

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau

Final Report
Louisiana Child and Family Services Review

February 5, 2004

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Final Report: Louisiana Child and Family Services Review

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of Louisiana. The CFSR is designed to assess State performance with regard to seven child welfare outcomes pertaining to children's safety, permanency, and well-being and seven systemic factors regarding the capacity of the State to achieve positive outcomes for children served by the child welfare system. The Louisiana CFSR was conducted the week of September 8, 2003. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the State child welfare agency – the Office of Community Services, Department of Social Services (OCS/DSS);
- The State Data Profile, prepared by the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which provides State child welfare data for the years 1999 through 2001;
- Reviews of 50 cases at three sites (Desoto/Natchitoches, Orleans, and St. Tammany Parishes); and
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State-level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to children, parents, foster parents, all levels of child welfare OCS/DSS personnel, Tribal representatives, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, and attorneys.

A key finding of the CFSR was that Louisiana achieved substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2 – The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children. OCS/DSS was found to make concerted efforts to ensure that children in foster care are placed, when appropriate, in close proximity to their parents or close relatives and with their siblings. OCS/DSS also was found to (1) promote frequent visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings, (2) preserve children's connections to their communities and extended families, (3) seek relatives as potential placement resources, and (4) support the bond between children and parents while children are in foster care.

Louisiana did not achieve substantial conformity with the other six child welfare outcomes. One area of concern was the State's performance on Permanency Outcome 1—Children have permanency and stability in their living situations. This outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in only 63.3 percent of the foster care cases reviewed. CFSR findings indicate that although OCS/DSS is effective with regard to preventing foster care re-entries, it is less consistent in establishing permanency goals for children and achieving permanency in a timely manner.

Delays with regard to achieving permanency in a timely manner were attributed to State laws and practices regarding adoption and not to court-related barriers. In fact, the CFSR findings indicate that the Louisiana Supreme Court has implemented several practices to

promote the attainment of permanency for children in a timely manner. One practice requires local courts to report all continuances to the Supreme Court; another practice requires the court to prepare compliance reports on cases that exceed allowable timeframes. In addition, stakeholder interviews and case review findings indicate that the courts adhere to the timelines for permanency established by the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

Another area of concern identified during the CFSR pertained to Well-Being Outcome 1—Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in only 68.0 percent of the 50 cases reviewed. However, the outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 90 percent of the foster care cases, compared to 40 percent of the “in-home services” cases. The findings of the in-home services cases were that OCS/DSS was not consistent in meeting the services needs of children and parents; involving parents and children in the case planning process; and establishing face-to-face contact with children and parents with sufficient frequency to ensure children’s safety and well-being.

CFSR case review findings also indicate that the child welfare agency was not consistent in its efforts to ensure that investigations of child maltreatment reports were initiated within the State-established timeframes. Reviewers determined that in 31 percent of the applicable cases, the response to a maltreatment report was not initiated within required timeframes, and that delays in responding occurred to maltreatment reports with priority classifications of “immediate priority” and “high priority.”

With regard to the systemic factors, the CFSR found that the State was in substantial conformity with all seven factors. Only three of the items assessing the systemic factors were rated as Areas Needing Improvement (items 25, 36, and 39). Assessment of these items determined that (1) OCS/DSS does not consistently involve parents in the case planning process; (2) diligent efforts are not made on a consistent basis to incorporate Tribal involvement in the development of the agency’s annual reports of progress; and (3) the accessibility of key services for children and families varies widely across the State.

The overall findings for the safety and permanency outcomes are presented in table 1 at the end of the Executive Summary. Findings regarding well-being outcomes are presented in table 2. Table 3 presents the State’s performance relative to the national standards and table 4 provides information pertaining to the State’s substantial conformity with the seven systemic factors assessed through the CFSR.

I. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO OUTCOMES

Safety Outcome 1: Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect

Safety Outcome 1 incorporates two indicators. One pertains to the timeliness of initiating a response to a child maltreatment report (item 1), and the other relates to the recurrence of substantiated or indicated maltreatment for the same children (item 2).

Louisiana did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 87.2 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity.
- Data for 2001, as reported in the State data profile, indicate that the State did not meet the national standards for (1) the percentage of children experiencing more than one substantiated or indicated child maltreatment report within a 6-month period, and (2) the percentage of children maltreated while in foster care.

A key finding of the CFSR was that in 31 percent of the applicable cases reviewed, OCS/DSS did not respond to a maltreatment allegation in accordance with the State-established timeframes. In addition, the delays in responding occurred to maltreatment reports classified as “immediate priority” (response within 24 hours) or “high priority” (response within 3 days).

Although the CFSR case reviews did not find evidence of frequent repeat maltreatment, as it is measured for the case review instrument (item 2), the State’s incidence of maltreatment recurrence for 2001 (6.8%) reported in the State Data Profile, did not meet the national standard of 6.1 percent or less. Also, in 20 percent of the 15 cases in which there was at least one substantiated report during the period under review, there were 2 substantiated reports within 6 months of one another.

Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate

Performance on Safety Outcome 2 is assessed through two indicators. One indicator (item 3) addresses the child welfare agency’s efforts to prevent children’s removal from their homes by providing services to the families that ensure children’s safety while they remain in their homes. The other indicator (item 4) pertains to the child welfare agency’s efforts to reduce risk of harm to children.

Louisiana did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was substantially achieved in 83.3 percent of the cases reviewed, which does not meet the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

A key finding of the CFSR case reviews was that OCS/DSS makes concerted efforts to reduce the risk of harm to the child (item 4). However, in 61 percent of the cases rated as a Strength for item 4, the risk of harm was managed by removing the child from the home. The results of the case reviews indicate that OCS/DSS is not consistently effective in its efforts to protect children while they remain in their homes. In these cases, the primary concern identified was that OCS/DSS does not provide the necessary services to ensure children's safety.

Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

There are six indicators incorporated in the assessment of permanency outcome 1, although not all of them are relevant for all children. The indicators pertain to the child welfare agency's efforts to prevent foster care re-entry (item 5), ensure placement stability for children in foster care (item 6), and establish appropriate permanency goals for children in foster care in a timely manner (item 7). Depending on the child's permanency goal, the remaining indicators focus on the child welfare agency's efforts to achieve permanency goals (such as reunification, guardianship, adoption, and permanent placement with relatives) in a timely manner (items 8 and 9), or to ensure that children who have "other planned living arrangements" as a case goal are in stable placements and adequately prepared for eventual independent living (item 10).

Louisiana did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 63.3 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity.
- Fiscal year (FY) 2001 data reported in the State Data Profile indicate that the State did not meet the national standards for (1) the percentage of children who achieved reunification within 12 months of entry into foster care, (2) the percentage of children who achieved a finalized adoption within 24 months of entry into foster care, or (3) the percentage of children in foster care for 12 months or less who experienced no more than 2 placement settings.

However, FY 2001 data provided in the State Data Profile indicate that the State met the national standard for the percentage of children entering foster care who were re-entering within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode.

Performance on this outcome varied across CFSR sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 87.5 percent of Desoto/Natchitoches cases, compared to 78 percent of St. Tammany cases and 38 percent of Orleans cases.

A key finding of the CFSR case reviews is that OCS/DSS is not consistent in its efforts to establish appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner or achieve finalized adoptions in a timely manner. However, CFSR findings do indicate that OCS/DSS is effective in preventing re-entries into foster care. Finally, although case reviews found that OCS/DSS makes concerted efforts to ensure

children's placement stability and to reunify children with parents or relatives in a timely manner, the State did not meet the national standards for these indicators, as reported in the State Data Profile.

Permanency Outcome 2. The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

Permanency Outcome 2 incorporates six indicators that assess the child welfare agency's performance with regard to (1) placing children in foster care in close proximity to their parents and close relatives (item 11); (2) placing siblings together (item 12); (3) ensuring frequent visitation between children and their parents and siblings in foster care (item 13); (4) preserving connections of children in foster care with extended family, community, cultural heritage, religion, and schools (item 14); (5) seeking relatives as potential placement resources (item 15); and (6) promoting the relationship between children and their parents while the children are in foster care (item 16).

Louisiana achieved substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 90.0 percent of the cases, which is equal to the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

Performance with respect to achieving Permanency Outcome 2 varied across localities included in the onsite CFSR. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 100 percent of St. Tammany cases and 92 percent of Orleans cases, compared to 75 percent of Desoto/Natchitoches cases.

CFSR case review findings indicate that OCS/DSS makes concerted efforts to: (1) ensure that foster care children are placed in close proximity to their parents and/or communities of origin whenever appropriate; (2) place children in foster care with their siblings whenever appropriate; (3) establish sufficient visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings in foster care; (4) maintain children's connections to extended family, religion, race/ethnic heritage, school, and friends while they are in foster care; (5) seek and evaluate both paternal and maternal relatives as placement resources; and (6) promote the parent-child relationship while children are in foster care.

Well Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

Well Being Outcome 1 incorporates four indicators. One pertains to the child welfare agency's efforts to ensure that the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents are assessed and that the necessary services are provided to meet identified needs (item 17). A second indicator assesses the child welfare agency's efforts to actively involve parents and children (when appropriate) in the case

planning process (item 18). The two remaining indicators examine the frequency and quality of caseworker's contacts with the children in their caseloads (item 19) and with the children's parents (item 20).

Louisiana did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 68.0 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity.

There was some variation across CFSR sites with regard to performance on this outcome. The outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 79 percent of Desoto/Natchitoches cases and 71 percent of St. Tammany cases, compared to 59 percent of Orleans cases. In addition, the outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 90 percent of the foster care cases compared to 40 percent of the in-home services cases.

The CFSR findings demonstrate that OCS/DSS makes concerted efforts to ensure that caseworkers' contacts with children are of sufficient frequency and quality to meet their needs and ensure their safety and well-being. However, the CFSR findings also demonstrate that OCS/DSS is not consistent in its efforts to meet the service needs of children and families, involve parents and children in case planning, and ensure sufficient contacts between caseworkers and parents. Lack of consistent effort to address these issues was more apparent in the in-home services cases than in the foster care cases. For example, the frequency and quality of caseworker contact with parents (item 20) was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of foster care cases compared to only 59 percent of the in-home services cases. In addition, OCS/DSS was found to meet the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents (item 17) in 90 percent of the foster care cases compared to only 45 percent of the in-home services cases.

Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

There is only one indicator for Well-Being Outcome 2. It pertains to the child welfare agency's efforts to assess and meet the educational needs of children in both foster care and in-home services cases (item 21).

Louisiana did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that 78.0 percent of the cases reviewed were found to have substantially achieved this outcome, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

Ratings for this outcome varied across CFSR sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 100 percent of St. Tammany cases, compared to 74 percent of Orleans cases and 64 percent of Desoto/ Natchitoches cases.

CFSR findings indicated that OCS/DSS is not consistent in meeting children's educational needs.

Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

This outcome incorporates two indicators that assess the child welfare agency's efforts to meet children's physical health (item 22) and mental health (item 23) needs.

Louisiana did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 72.9 percent of the 48 applicable cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity.

Performance on this outcome varied considerably across CFSR sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 92 percent of St. Tammany cases, compared to 68 percent of Orleans cases and 62 percent of Desoto/Natchitoches cases.

This CFSR finding suggests that OCS/DSS is consistent in its efforts to meet children's physical health needs, but is less consistent in making concerted efforts to meet children's mental health needs. A key concern identified pertained to the lack of accessibility of mental health services. Both the case reviews and information from stakeholder interviews indicate that many children in OCS/DSS caseloads have mental health service needs that are not being addressed.

II. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO SYSTEMIC FACTORS

Statewide Information System

Substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System is determined by whether the State is operating a Statewide information system that can identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for children in foster care.

Louisiana is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. The CFSR determined that the State's statewide information system—the Tracking Information and Payment System (TIPS)—readily identifies the status, demographic characteristics, location, and placement goals for children in foster care. The Statewide Assessment notes that TIPS produces over 600 reports and has the capacity to deliver on-demand reports (e.g., supervisory reports, financial reports, client

outcomes and aggregate data reports, and program reports) to State, regional, and Parish offices. TIPS also has a “tickler” feature for services and case review requirements, including permanency hearings.

Case Review System

Five indicators are used to assess the State’s performance with regard to the systemic factor of a Case Review System. The indicators examine the development of case plans and parent involvement in that process (item 25), the consistency of 6-month case reviews (item 26) and 12-month permanency hearings (item 27), the implementation of procedures to seek termination of parental rights (TPR) in accordance with the timeframes established in the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) (item 28), and the notification and inclusion of foster and pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers in case reviews and hearings (item 29).

Louisiana is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. CFSR findings indicate that Louisiana provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child no less frequently than once every 6 months and ensures that each foster care child under the State’s placement and care responsibility has a permanency hearing no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter. The Statewide Assessment notes that in 2002, the Louisiana Supreme Court issued a set of orders for child welfare cases. Along with mandatory ASFA training for judges, the orders included the requirement that courts must report continuances to the Supreme Court and prepare compliance reports on cases that exceed allowable timeframes.

Stakeholders identified the following OCS/DSS and court-related practices as contributing to timely and productive hearings:

- Having a person who serves as a liaison between the OCS/DSS and court,
- Using court staff to search for absent parents, and
- Adopting the bench book developed by the Court Improvement Program to guide the hearing.

CFSR findings also indicate that the State has implemented TPR practices and procedures that are ASFA-compliant and has a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of foster care children to be notified of, and to have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.

The key concern identified with regard to this factor was the lack of consistent involvement of parents in the case-planning process.

Quality Assurance System

Performance with regard to the systemic factor of Quality Assurance System is based on whether the State has developed standards to ensure the safety and health of children in foster care (item 30), and whether the State is operating a statewide quality assurance system that evaluates the quality and effectiveness of services and measures program strengths and areas needing improvement (item 31).

Louisiana is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Quality Assurance System. Louisiana has developed and implemented standards to ensure that foster children are provided quality services that protect the children's safety and health. In addition, Louisiana operates a multi-faceted quality assurance system that (1) is in place in all OCS/DSS Regions where the services included in the State's Consolidated CFSP are provided, (2) evaluates the quality of services, (3) identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, (4) provides relevant reports, and (5) evaluates the program improvement measures that have been implemented.

State-level stakeholders suggested that the State's involvement in the Council on Accreditation (COA) process has contributed to the development of many of the QA procedures and that the QA process has resulted in positive changes in policy and practice, such as greater individualization of service plans and increased focus on safety and health assessments. Stakeholders noted that the CQI and Peer Case review processes have resulted in regional corrective action plans for OCS/DSS and have enhanced individual professional development.

Training

The systemic factor of Training incorporates an assessment of the State's new caseworker training program (item 32), ongoing training for child welfare agency staff (item 33), and training for foster and adoptive parents (item 34).

Louisiana achieved substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training. The CFSR findings indicate that Louisiana is operating a staff development and training program that supports the State's Consolidated CFSP goals and objectives, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services. Stakeholders interviewed during the onsite CFSR reported that the training is effective and prepares new workers to do their jobs. The CFSR findings also indicate that Louisiana requires 32 hours of ongoing training annually during the second and third years of employment. Twenty hours of ongoing training are required annually following the third year of employment. Finally, the CFSR found that Louisiana provides short-term training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or

approved facilities that care for children receiving title IV-E foster care or adoption assistance that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.

Service Array

The assessment of the systemic factor of Service Array addresses three questions:

- (1) Does the State have in place an array of services to meet the needs of children and families served by the child welfare agency (item 35)?
- (2) Are these services accessible to families and children throughout the State (item 36)?
- (3) Can services be individualized to meet the unique needs of the children and family served by the child welfare agency (item 37)?

Louisiana is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array. CFSR findings indicate that Louisiana has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency. In addition, it was determined that services can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families. However, the CFSR findings also indicate that not all services are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the Louisiana Consolidated CFSP.

Agency Responsiveness to the Community

Performance with regard to the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community incorporates an assessment of the State's consultation with external stakeholders in developing the Child and Family Services Plan (items 38 and 39), and the extent to which the State coordinates child welfare services with services or benefits of other Federal or federally-assisted programs serving the same population (item 40).

Louisiana is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. CFSR findings indicate that Louisiana engages in ongoing consultation with Tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child and family-serving agencies, and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the Consolidated CFSP. In addition, the CFSR determined that Louisiana's Consolidated CFSP services are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population. A concern identified with respect to this factor was that Louisiana did not always make concerted efforts to promote the participation of federally recognized Tribes in the annual reporting of progress and services process or to share final Annual Progress and Services Reports with those Tribes.

Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

The assessment of this systemic factor focuses on the State's standards for foster homes and child care institutions (items 41 and 42), the State's compliance with Federal requirements for criminal background checks for foster and adoptive parents (item 43), the State's efforts to recruit foster and adoptive parents that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of foster children (item 44), and the State's activities with regard to using cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate permanent placements for waiting children (item 45).

Louisiana achieved substantial conformity with the systemic factor pertaining to Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. Key CFSR findings were the following:

- Louisiana has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions that are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards and the standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.
- Louisiana complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements for children.
- Louisiana has in place an identifiable process for assuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed. The pool of foster/adoptive homes [57.4% African American and 42.6% Caucasian] is a virtual match to the racial composition of children in foster care [58.5% African American and 39.3% Caucasian].
- Louisiana has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children. During the period October 1999 to September 30, 2001, 178 interstate adoptions were realized.

Table 1. Louisiana CFSR Ratings for Safety and Permanency Outcomes and Items

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings			Item Ratings		
	<i>In Substantial Conformity?</i>	<i>Percent Substantially Achieved*</i>	<i>Met National Standards?</i>	<i>Rating**</i>	<i>Percent Strength</i>	<i>Met National Standards</i>
Safety Outcome 1-Children are first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect	No	87.2	No			
Item 1: Timeliness of investigations				ANI	69	
Item 2: Repeat maltreatment				ANI	94	No
Safety Outcome 2 - Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate	No	83.3				
Item 3: Services to prevent removal				ANI	79	
Item 4: Risk of harm				Strength	85	
Permanency Outcome 1- Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	No	63.3	1 met, 3 not met			
Item 5: Foster care re-entry				Strength	100	Yes
Item 6: Stability of foster care placements				ANI	90	No
Item 7: Permanency goal for child				ANI	80	
Item 8: Reunification, guardianship, placement with relatives				ANI	100	No
Item 9: Adoption				ANI	33	No
Item 10: Other planned living arrangement				ANI	69	
Permanency Outcome 2 - The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved	Yes	90.0				
Item 11: Proximity of placement				Strength	100	
Item 12: Placement with siblings				Strength	94	
Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care				Strength	87.5	
Item 14: Preserving connections				Strength	87	
Item 15: Relative placement				Strength	86	
Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents				Strength	95	

*90 percent of the applicable cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome for the State to be in substantial conformity with the outcome.

**Items may be rated as a Strength or an Area Needing Improvement (ANI)

***Item 8 was assigned an overall rating of ANI because although 100% of the applicable cases were rated as a strength the State did not meet the associated national standard.

Table 2. Louisiana CFSR Ratings for Child and Family Well Being Outcomes and Items

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings		Item Ratings			
	<i>In Substantial Conformity?</i>	<i>Percent Substantially Achieved*</i>	<i>Met National Standards</i>	<i>Rating**</i>	<i>Percent Strength</i>	<i>Met National Standards</i>
Well Being Outcome 1 - Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs	No	68.0				
Item 17: Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents				ANI	72	
Item 18: Child/family involvement in case planning				ANI	67	
Item 19: Caseworker visits with child				Strength	86	
Item 20: Caseworker visits with parents				ANI	80	
Well Being Outcome 2 - Children receive services to meet their educational needs	No	78.0				
Item 21: Educational needs of child				ANI	78	
Well Being Outcome 3 - Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs are met	No	72.9				
Item 22: Physical health of child				Strength	95	
Item 23: Mental health of child				ANI	74	

*90 percent of the applicable cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome for the State to be in substantial conformity with the outcome.

**Items may be rated as a Strength or an Area Needing Improvement (ANI).

Table 3: Louisiana's Performance on the Six Outcome Measures for Which National Standards have been Established

Outcome Measure	National Standard	Louisiana Data
Of all children who were victims of a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report in the first 6 months of CY 2001, what percent were victims of another substantiated or indicated report within a 6-month period?	6.1% or less	6.8%
Of all children who were in foster care in the first 9 months of CY 2001, what percent experienced maltreatment from foster parents or facility staff members?	.57% or less	0.58%
Of all children who entered foster care in FY 2001, what percent were re-entering care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode?	8.6% or less	7.8%
Of all children reunified from foster care in FY 2001, what percent were reunified within 12 months of entry into foster care?	76.2% or more	65.0%
Of all children who were adopted from foster care in FY 2001, what percent were adopted within 24 months of their entry into foster care?	32.0% or more	11.6%
Of all children in foster care during FY 2001 for less than 12 months, what percent experienced no more than 2 placement settings?	86.7% or more	83.3%

Table 4: Louisiana CFSR Ratings for the Seven Systemic Factors

Systemic Factors	In Substantial Conformity?*	Rating**
IV. Statewide Information System	Yes (3)	
Item 24: System can identify the status, demographic characteristics, location and goals of children in foster care		Strength
V. Case Review System	Yes (3)	
Item 25: Process for developing a case plan and for joint case planning with parents		ANI
Item 26: Process for 6-month case reviews		Strength
Item 27: Process for 12-month permanency hearings		Strength
Item 28: Process for seeking TPR in accordance with ASFA		Strength
Item 29: Process for notifying caregivers of reviews and hearings and for opportunity for them to be heard		Strength
VI. Quality Assurance System	Yes (4)	
Item 30: Standards to ensure quality services and ensure children's safety and health		Strength
Item 31: Identifiable QA system that evaluates the quality of services and improvements		Strength
VII. Training	Yes (4)	
Item 32: Provision of initial staff training		Strength
Item 33: Provision of ongoing staff training that addresses the necessary skills and knowledge.		Strength
Item 34: Provision of training for caregivers and adoptive parents that addresses the necessary skills and knowledge		Strength
VIII. Service Array	Yes (3)	
Item 35: Availability of array of critical services		Strength
Item 36: Accessibility of services across all jurisdictions		ANI
Item 37: Ability to individualize services to meet unique needs		Strength
IX. Agency Responsiveness to the Community	Yes (3)	
Item 38: Engages in ongoing consultation with critical stakeholders in developing the CFSP		Strength
Item 39: Develops annual progress reports in consultation with stakeholders		ANI
Item 40: Coordinates services with other Federal programs		Strength
X. Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention	Yes (4)	
Item 41: Standards for foster family and child care institutions		Strength
Item 42: Standards are applied equally to all foster family and child care institutions		Strength
Item 43: Conducts necessary criminal background checks		Strength
Item 44: Diligent recruitment of foster and adoptive families that reflect children's racial and ethnic diversity		Strength
Item 45: Uses cross-jurisdictional resources to find placements		Strength

*Systemic factors are rated on a scale from 1 to 4. A rating of 1 or 2 indicates "Not in Substantial Conformity." A rating of 3 or 4 indicates Substantial Conformity.

** Individual items may be rated either as a Strength or as an Area Needing Improvement (ANI).

FINAL REPORT OF THE LOUISIANA CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of Louisiana. The CFSR assesses a State's performance with regard to seven child welfare outcomes pertaining to children's safety, permanency, and well-being and with regard to seven systemic factors relevant to the State's capacity to achieve positive outcomes for children and families served by the child welfare system.

The Louisiana CFSR was conducted during the week of September 8, 2003. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

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- Reviews of 50 cases at three sites (Desoto/Natchitoches, Orleans, and St. Tammany Parishes); and
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State-level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to children, parents, foster parents, all levels of child welfare OCS/DSS personnel, Tribal representatives, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, and attorneys.

The key characteristics of the 50 cases reviewed are the following:

- Twenty-two cases were reviewed in Orleans, 14 in Desoto/Natchitoches, and 14 in St. Tammany.
- All 50 cases had been open cases at some time during the period under review.
- Thirty cases were "foster care cases" (cases in which children were in the care and custody of the State child welfare OCS/DSS and in the custody of the Department of Public Safety and Corrections/Office of Youth Development; and in an out-of-home placement at some time during the period under review), and 20 were "in-home services cases" (cases in which families received services from the child welfare OCS/DSS while children remained with their families and no child in the family was in out-of-home care during the period under review).
- Of the 30 foster care cases, 6 children (20%) were younger than age 10 at the start of the period under review; 3 children (10%) were at least 10 years old, but not yet 13 years old; and 21 children (70%) were 13 years of age and older at the start of the period under review.
- All children in the family were African-American in 34 cases, White in 15 cases, and Native American in 1 case.

- Of the 50 cases reviewed, the primary reason for the opening of a child welfare case was the following:
 - Neglect (not including medical neglect) – 18 cases (36%)
 - Physical abuse – 12 cases (24%)
 - Sexual abuse – 5 cases (10%)
 - Child’s behavior/Child in juvenile justice system – 5 cases (10%)
 - Abandonment – 3 cases (6%)
 - Medical neglect – 2 cases (4%)
 - Substance abuse by parents – 2 cases (4%)
 - Mental/physical health of parent – 1 case (2%)
 - Mental/physical health of child – 1 case (2%)
 - One additional case was opened because the death of a child in the family raised questions about whether the death could be attributed to neglect and whether remaining children in the home were at risk.
- Of the 50 cases reviewed, the most frequently cited reasons for children coming to the attention of the child welfare agency were the following:
 - Neglect (not including medical neglect) – 32 cases (64% of cases)
 - Physical Abuse – 18 cases (36% of cases)
 - Sexual abuse – 9 cases (18% of all cases)
- In 23 (77%) of the 30 foster care cases, the children entered foster care prior to the period under review and remained in care during the entire period under review.

The first section of the report presents CFSR findings relevant to the State’s performance in achieving the seven outcomes for children in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. For each outcome, there is a table presenting key findings, a discussion of the State’s status with regard to the outcome, and a presentation and discussion of each item (indicator) assessed. For the most part, findings are presented for all three sites taken together, with differences among sites described when they are particularly noteworthy. The second section of the report provides an assessment and discussion of the findings regarding the seven systemic factors relevant to the State’s ability to achieve positive outcomes for children.

SECTION 1: OUTCOMES

I. SAFETY

Safety Outcome 1

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Desoto/ Natchitoches	Orleans	St. Tammany	Total	Total Percent
Substantially Achieved:	11	19	11	41	87.2
Partially Achieved:	1	2	1	4	8.5
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	1	1	2	4.3
Not Applicable:	2	0	1		
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard (percent)	State's Percentage	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard	
Repeat maltreatment	6.1 or less	6.8		X	
Maltreatment of children in foster care	.57 or less	0.58		X	

STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 1

Louisiana did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 87.2 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity.
- Data for 2001, as reported in the State data profile, indicate that the State did not meet the national standards for (1) the percentage of children experiencing more than one substantiated or indicated child maltreatment report within a 6-month period, and (2) the percentage of children maltreated while in foster care.

A key CFSR case review finding was that OCS/DSS did not establish face-to-face contact with the alleged child victim and parents/caretakers in accordance with the State-established timeframes in 31 percent of the applicable cases. In addition, the delays in responding occurred to maltreatment reports classified as “immediate priority” (response within 24 hours) or “high priority” (response within 3 days).

Although CFSR case reviews did not find evidence of frequent repeat maltreatment, as it is measured for the case review instrument (item 2), the State's incidence of maltreatment recurrence for 2001 (6.8%) reported in the State Data Profile, did not meet the national standard of 6.1 percent or less. Also, in 20 percent of the 15 cases in which there was at least one substantiated report during the period under review, there were 2 substantiated reports within 6 months of one another.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 1 are presented below.

Item 1. Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: The assessment of item 1 was applicable for 16 of the 50 cases. Thirty-four cases were not applicable because they did not involve reports of child maltreatment during the period under review. In assessing item 1, reviewers were to determine whether the response to a maltreatment report occurring during the period under review had been initiated in accordance with OCS/DSS requirements. Louisiana has the following priorities and corresponding timeframes for responding to maltreatment reports:

- Immediate priority – The first face-to-face contact with the alleged child victim and his/her parent/caretaker must occur within 24 hours of receipt of the report by OCS/DSS.
- High priority – The first face-to-face contact with the alleged child victim and his/her parent/caretaker must occur within 3 calendar days of receipt of the report by OCS/DSS.
- Non-emergency – The first face-to-face contact with the alleged child victim and his/her parents/caretaker must occur within 5 calendar days of receipt of the report by OCS/DSS.

The results of the case review assessments were the following:

- Item 1 was rated as a Strength in 11 (69%) of the 16 applicable cases (2 of the 11 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 1 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 5 (31%) of the 16 applicable cases (none of the 5 cases were foster care cases).

Ratings for these items varied across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of Desoto/Natchitoches cases, compared to 57 percent of Orleans cases and 33 percent of St. Tammany cases. However, there were only three applicable cases in St. Tammany, compared to six applicable cases in Desoto/Natchitoches and seven in Orleans.

Item 1 was rated as a Strength when a response to a maltreatment report was initiated, and face-to-face contact established, within the State-required timeframes. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when the response was not initiated within required timeframes. In two of the five cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item, the maltreatment report was classified as “Immediate,” and in three of the five cases, the report was classified as “High Priority.” In one case in which the maltreatment allegation was classified as “immediate priority,” face-to-face contact was not established until 5 days after receipt of the report; in the other case, face-to-face contact was not made until 17 days after receipt of the report.

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that OCS/DSS responds to maltreatment reports in a timely manner. In addition, several stakeholders suggested that responses to immediate and high priority reports are particularly timely. This information is not consistent with case review findings.

A key concern expressed by stakeholders pertained to the risk classifications of maltreatment allegations. They noted that a great deal of valuable historical information is not available to workers when they make the risk allegation because the State expunges information from the record pertaining to maltreatment reports that are not substantiated.

Determination and Discussion: Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 31 percent of the applicable cases, OCS/DSS had not initiated a response to a maltreatment report in accordance with required timeframes. In addition, in all cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement, the maltreatment reports had been classified as either “immediate” or “high” priority.

According to the Statewide Assessment, peer case reviews that were conducted in State fiscal year (SFY) 2003 as part of the State’s self-assessment process found that item 1 (addressing timeliness of initiating investigations) was rated as a Strength in 62.3 percent of the cases reviewed Statewide, 66.7 percent of Orleans Region (New Orleans) cases, 71.4 percent of Covington region (St. Tammany) cases, and 75 percent of Shreveport Region (Desoto/Natchitoches) cases (the number of cases included in the review was not provided in the Statewide Assessment). These findings are consistent with the findings of the onsite CFSR.

The State’s peer case review process utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

The Statewide Assessment also indicates that Louisiana maintains 8, 24-hour, 7-days per week hotlines for urban areas; 2, 24-hour weekend hotlines in Lafayette and Terrebonne Parishes; and “regular working hours only” hotlines in all other Parishes. Hotlines receive reports of suspected abuse and neglect. Child Protection Investigative (CPI) workers determine report validity, assess risk, and develop requisite safety plans including provision of limited services. Services may consist of safety assessment and planning; risk assessment; emergency medical care; emergency removal and placement; referral to OCS/DSS Family Services Program; referral

to other agencies; counseling; and/or Preventive Assistance Fund services. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, the average vacancy rate in CPI positions is less than 10 percent.

Additional information in the Statewide Assessment reports that foster care workers are mandated to report any conditions that present substantial risk of harm to health or welfare of children in foster care. Agency policy requires that allegations of maltreatment by foster care providers are to be investigated by CPI workers. When a report of alleged abuse/neglect by foster care providers occurs, case workers are required to make extra visits with the child/children and foster parents. The foster care worker is required to visit with the foster child within 7 days of report of alleged abuse/neglect. OCS/DSS evaluates safety issues with contracted residential and private child-placing providers when there are valid child abuse/neglect findings.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: The assessment of item 2 was applicable for 47 of the 50 cases. Three cases were not applicable because there was never a substantiated maltreatment report on the family. In one case, the child entered foster care through the juvenile justice system; in the second case, a mother requested services for her pregnant 12-year-old daughter; and in the third case, preventive services were provided because of concerns regarding a child's behavior. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether there had ever been a substantiated report on the family. Reviewers also were to determine if there was at least one substantiated maltreatment report during the period under review, and if so, if another substantiated or indicated report occurred within 6 months of that report. The results of the assessment were the following:

- Item 2 was rated as a Strength in 44 (94%) of the 47 applicable cases (28 of the 44 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 2 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 3 (6%) of the 47 applicable cases (1 of the 3 cases was a foster care case).

Item 2 was rated as a Strength under the following circumstances:

- There was a substantiated maltreatment report involving the family prior to the period under review, but no substantiated or indicated report during the period under review (31 cases).
- There was a substantiated maltreatment report involving the family during the period under review, but there was no substantiated or indicated report within 6 months of that report (12 cases).
- There were two substantiated maltreatment reports within 6 months of one another, but they did not involve the same perpetrator (1 case).

The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 3 cases in which 2 or more reports occurred within 6 months of a previous report and involved similar circumstances and the same perpetrator.

Findings for all 50 cases with respect to the frequency of substantiated maltreatment reports on the family prior to and during the period under review were the following:

- In 3 cases, there were no substantiated maltreatment reports over the life of the case.
- In 19 cases, there was 1 substantiated maltreatment report over the life of the case.
- In 22 cases, there were between 2 and 5 substantiated maltreatment reports over the life of the case.
- In 6 cases, there were between 6 and 12 substantiated maltreatment reports over the life of the case.

Of the 30 foster care cases, 21 involved multiple substantiated maltreatment reports before the child was placed in foster care.

Some stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that maltreatment does recur and that this is of concern to OCS/DSS staff. Other stakeholders, however, suggested that the OCS/DSS practice of assessing risk on an ongoing basis is effective in preventing maltreatment recurrence.

Determination and Discussion: Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although this item was rated as a Strength in 94 percent of the cases reviewed, the State's rate of maltreatment recurrence for 2001 (6.8%) reported in the State Data Profile, did not meet the national standard of 6.1 percent or less. The standards and criteria for both measures must be met for the item to be rated as a Strength. In addition, in 3 (20%) of the 15 cases in which there was at least one substantiated report during the period under review, there was another substantiated report within a 6-month period.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Louisiana has implemented an Assessment Model Approach in two Parishes: Orleans and Jefferson. The Statewide Assessment suggests that this model is an effective tool for minimizing and/or eliminating repeat maltreatment and notes that the model's use in Orleans Parish in 2001 resulted in 83 percent of assessed cases having no subsequent referrals/reports for investigation/assessment. The Statewide Assessment also reports that the Tracking Information and Payment System (the State's management information system) is used to track and measure repeat maltreatment.

Information in the Statewide Assessment indicates that peer case reviews conducted as part of the State's self-assessment process resulted in the following findings with regard to the percentage of cases in which there was no maltreatment recurrence:

- 91 percent of the cases reviewed Statewide;
- 84 percent of Orleans region cases;
- 96 percent of Covington region cases; and

- 94.7 percent of Shreveport Region cases.

The State's peer case review process utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

Safety Outcome 2

Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Desoto/ Natchitoches	Orleans	St. Tammany	Total	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	10	18	12	40	83.3
Partially Achieved:	0	1	0	1	2.1
Not Achieved or Addressed:	2	3	2	7	14.6
Not Applicable:	2	0	0		

STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 2

Louisiana did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was substantially achieved in 83.3 percent of the cases reviewed, which does not meet the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

A key CFSR case review finding was that OCS/DSS makes concerted efforts to reduce the risk of harm to the child (item 4). However, in 61 percent of the cases rated as a Strength for item 4, the risk of harm was managed by removing the child from the home. The results of the case reviews indicate that OCS/DSS is not consistently effective in its efforts to protect children while they remain in their homes. In these cases, the primary concern identified was that OCS/DSS does not provide the necessary services to ensure children's safety.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 2 are presented and discussed below.

Item 3. Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: There were 28 cases for which an assessment of item 3 was applicable. Cases were excluded from this assessment if the children entered foster care prior to the period under review and/or there were no substantiated or indicated maltreatment reports or identified risks of harm to the children in the home during the period under review. For this item, reviewers assessed whether, in responding to a substantiated maltreatment report or risk of harm, OCS/DSS made diligent efforts to provide services to families to prevent removal of children from their homes while at the same time ensuring their safety. The results of the assessment were the following:

- Item 3 was rated as a Strength in 22 (79%) of the 28 applicable cases (6 of the 22 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 3 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 6 (21%) of the 28 applicable cases (2 of the 6 cases were foster care cases).

Item 3 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Appropriate services were provided to the parents and child to prevent removal (17 cases).
- The children were appropriately removed from the home to ensure their safety (2 cases).
- Services were provided to the family while children were placed voluntarily with a relative (1 case).
- Appropriate services were provided to the family after reunification to prevent the child's re-entry into foster care (2 cases).

The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- OCS/DSS did not conduct the necessary assessments or offer appropriate services to ensure that children could be safely maintained in the home (5 cases). In one of these cases, the child was placed on a voluntary basis with a relative without assessment of the relative's ability to provide for the child.
- The services provided were not adequate to ensure the safety of the children in the home (1 case). In this case, it was recommended that the child and family receive therapy 1 to 4 hours weekly, but no contact was made with the family to provide this service for several months.

Services provided to the families included, but were not limited to: homemakers; parent aides; intensive in-home services, including in-home therapy; mental health assessments including psychological evaluations; mental health services including counseling, group therapy, and individual therapy; job counseling; concrete services such as provision of funds for utility bills, bus tokens, and household supplies; early childhood education services; parenting skills training and parenting education including teaching parents behavior modification techniques; recreation camps; family preservation services; housing services, substance abuse assessment and treatment services; medical services including home health nurses; and domestic violence services.

Some stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that (1) OCS/DSS makes concerted efforts to provide services to families to prevent children's removal from their homes and (2) services are available to meet this objective. Other stakeholders, however, noted that OCS/DSS is not consistent in conducting comprehensive risk assessments. They expressed the opinion, for example, that issues pertaining to domestic violence frequently are not identified in the assessment process.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 21 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that OCS/DSS had not made diligent efforts to provide the necessary services to maintain children safely in their own homes.

According to the Statewide Assessment, OCS/DSS provides services to families and children to address problems of abuse or neglect and promote the safety of the children living with their family, relatives, or other persons while remaining in the custody of their parent(s). Services are administered statewide by the Assistant Secretary of OCS, and provided through 10 regional offices and 53 Parish offices.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, Louisiana provides multiple-component services including family-based in-home services, protective service day care, homemaker services, temporary voluntary out-of-home placement, referral to treatment resources, preventive services for at risk populations, access to preventive assistance fund, LIHEAP, preventive family services, access/referral to a Statewide network of 19 child welfare family resource centers, family preservation and support services, services under contracts for parent skills building, and residential treatment services.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that peer case reviews, conducted as part of the State's self-assessment process, examined whether OCS/DSS had provided services to families to protect children in the home and prevent removal (the number of cases and criteria for ratings were not specified). This peer case review process resulted in the finding that the indicator was rated as a Strength in:

- 91.1 percent of cases Statewide;
- 90.9 percent of cases in the Orleans Region;
- 81.3 percent of cases in the Covington Region; and
- 92.3 percent of cases in the Shreveport Region.

The State's peer case review process utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

Item 4. Risk of harm to child

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 4 was applicable for 48 cases. Two foster care cases were not applicable for assessment because contact with OCS/DSS was due to the child's behavior and the child was not at risk of harm from guardians or parents. In

assessing item 4, reviewers were to determine whether OCS/DSS had made, or was making, diligent efforts to reduce the risk of harm to the children involved in each case. The assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 4 was rated as a Strength in 41 (85%) of the 48 applicable cases (25 of the 41 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 4 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 7 (15%) of the 48 applicable cases (3 of the 7 cases were foster care cases).

Item 4 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The risk of harm to children was appropriately managed by providing services to families to address risk concerns while the children remain in the home or in a voluntary placement with relatives (16 cases).
- The risk of harm to children was appropriately managed by removing the children from home either prior to or during the period under review and, when possible, providing services to the family (18 cases).
- The risk of harm to children was appropriately addressed by removing the children from the home either prior to or during the period under review and seeking termination of parental rights (TPR) (7 cases).

The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- Either no services were offered or the services offered by OCS/DSS were insufficient to reduce the risk of harm to the child (4 cases).
- OCS/DSS did not take the necessary measures to ensure that risk of harm was adequately addressed (3 cases). For example, in one case, a child was placed with a relative who was a known substance abuser. In another case, the child was in “runaway” status during the entire period under review and there was little evidence that appropriate services had been provided to prevent the child from running away or that the OCS/DSS was making concerted efforts to find the child.

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that OCS/DSS is effective in managing risk of harm to children and that workers often “go the extra mile to ensure safety.” Stakeholders noted that the primary strategy for managing risk in in-home services cases is through frequent in-home visits and ongoing risk assessment. Some stakeholders reported that weekly staffing of cases help to ensure that risk of harm is being addressed in an effective manner. A few stakeholders indicated that ongoing risk assessments were not being conducted in a consistent manner.

Stakeholders also reported that maltreatment in foster care is rare. They noted that when there is a report of maltreatment by a foster care provider, OCS/DSS “responds appropriately.”

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 85 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that OCS/DSS was effective in addressing the risk of harm to the children.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the peer case reviews conducted as part of the State's self assessment found that risk of harm was adequately address in:

- 91.8 percent of the cases reviewed Statewide;
- 81 percent of cases reviewed in the Orleans Region;
- 91.3 percent of cases reviewed in the Covington Region; and
- 95.2 percent of cases reviewed in the Shreveport Region.

The number of cases reviewed and the criteria for the ratings were not specified. The State's peer case review process utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

II. PERMANENCY

Permanency Outcome 1

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Desoto/ Natchitoches	Orleans	St. Tammany	Total	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	7	5	7	19	63.3
Partially Achieved:	1	8	2	11	36.7
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	0	0	0	
Not Applicable:	6	9	5		
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard (percentage)	State's Percentage	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard	
Foster care re-entries	8.6 or less	7.8	X		
Length of time to achieve reunification	76.2 or more	65.0		X	
Length of time to achieve adoption	32.0 or more	11.6		X	
Stability of foster care placements	86.7 or more	83.3		X	

STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME 1

Louisiana did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 63.3 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity.
- Fiscal year (FY) 2001 data reported in the State Data Profile indicate that the State did not meet the national standards for the percentage of children who achieved reunification within 12 months of entry into foster care, (2) the percentage of children who achieved a finalized adoption within 24 months of entry into foster care, or (3) the percentage of children in foster care for 12 months or less who experienced no more than 2 placement settings.

However, FY 2001 data provided in the State Data Profile indicate that the State met the national standard for the percentage of children entering foster care who were re-entering within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode.

Performance on this outcome varied across CFSR sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 87.5 percent of Desoto/Natchitoches cases, compared to 78 percent of St. Tammany cases and 38 percent of Orleans cases.

A key finding of the CFSR case reviews is that OCS/DSS is not consistent in its efforts to establish appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner. In addition, data provided in the State Data Profile and case review findings indicate that OCS/DSS does not always make concerted efforts to achieve finalized adoptions in a timely manner. However, the State Data Profile data and case review findings also indicate that OCS/DSS is consistent in preventing re-entries into foster care. Although the case reviews found that OCS/DSS makes concerted efforts to ensure children's placement stability and to reunify children with parents or relatives in a timely manner, FY 2001 data reported in the State Data Profile indicate that the State does not meet the national standards for these indicators.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 1 are presented below.

Item 5. Foster care re-entries

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Four of the 30 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of foster care re-entries because they involved children who entered foster care at some time during the period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the entry into foster care during the period under review occurred within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode. The assessment resulted in the finding that all four cases (100%) were rated as a Strength for this item.

Item 5 was rated as a Strength when the child's entry into foster care during the period under review did not take place within 12 months of discharge from a prior episode. However, in most of the cases reviewed during the onsite CFSR, children entered foster care prior to the period under review.

Stakeholders commenting on this item were in agreement that re-entries into foster care are rare. They attributed this to the extensive post-reunification monitoring and supervision to support families that is provided by OCS/DSS from 3 to 6 months after reunification. Some stakeholders also attributed the lack of re-entries to the caution exercised by the OCS/DSS in reunifying families.

Determination and Discussion: Item 5 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the following:

- In 100 percent of the applicable cases reviewed, children did not re-enter foster care within 12 months of discharge from a prior episode.
- FY 2001 data in the State Data Profile indicate that Louisiana's re-entry rate (7.8%) met the national standard of 8.6 percent or less.

According to the Statewide Assessment, foster care re-entries are tracked using the Tracking Information and Payment System (TIPS). Based on State FY (SFY) 2001 data, the Statewide Assessment reports that foster care re-entries are the result of adoption dissolutions, unsuccessful reunifications with parents, and unsuccessful kinship placements. In order to prevent foster care re-entry, OCS/DSS provides community-based programs, Day Programs, close monitoring, and family preservation programs.

The Statewide Assessment also reports the following findings of the peer case reviews in SFY 2003 with regard to ratings for this indicator:

- Statewide, 91.5 percent of the cases did not have foster care re-entries.
- In the Orleans Region, 66.7 percent of the cases did not have foster care re-entries.
- In the Covington Region, 100 percent of the cases did not have foster care re-entries.
- In the Shreveport Region, 100 percent of the cases did not have foster care re-entries.

The State's peer case review process utilizes a modified version of a CFSR case review instrument.

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: All 30 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of Item 6. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the child experienced multiple placement settings during the period under review and, if so, whether the changes in placement settings were necessary to achieve the child's permanency goal or meet the child's service needs. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 6 was rated as a Strength in 27 (90%) of the 30 applicable cases.
- Item 6 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 3 (10%) of the 30 applicable cases.

Additional findings of the case review were the following:

- Children in 13 cases experienced only 1 placement during the period under review.
- Children in 11 cases experienced 2 placements during the period under review.
- Children in 3 cases experienced 3 placements during the period under review.
- Children in 3 cases experienced 4 or more placements during the period under review.

Item 6 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined either that the child did not experience a placement change during the period under review (13 cases), or that the placement changes experienced were in the child's best interest (14 cases), such as movement to a less restrictive placement or a change in placement to receive necessary treatment services. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the child's current placement was not stable (2 cases) and/or that placement changes were due to inadequate assessments of the child's needs and the ability of the placement resource to meet those needs (2 cases).

Most stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that, for the most part, children in foster care do not change placements and, when they do, it is due to their behaviors. Stakeholders reported that in many instances, mentoring and respite services are provided to foster parents to support them when problems arise. A few stakeholders, however, suggested that improvements are needed in the area of evaluating children and making placement decisions based on the needs identified in the evaluation. Other stakeholders noted that placement changes might be reduced if there were more foster parents with the skills to parent children with behavioral and emotional problems.

Determination and Discussion: Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although in 90 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that OCS/DSS was effective in ensuring children's placement stability, FY 2001 data from the State Data

Profile indicate that Louisiana's percentage of children experiencing no more than 2 placements in their first 12 months in foster care (83.3) did not meet the national standard of 86.7 percent or more. The standards and criteria for both measures must be met for the item to be rated as a Strength.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State's performance with regard to the national measure of stability of children's placement in foster care has improved from FFY 1999 to FFY 2001. In FFY 1999, the percentage of children who experienced no more than 2 placement settings in their first 12 months in foster care was 80.3, while in FFY 2001, it was 83.3.

The Statewide Assessment also reports the findings of the State's peer case reviews conducted in SFY 2003 with regard to stability of foster care placements (again the number of cases and the criteria for the rating were not specified). The data provided in the Statewide Assessment indicated that stability in foster care placements was rated as a Strength in:

- 72.3 percent of the cases reviewed Statewide;
- 35.3 percent of the cases reviewed in the Orleans Region;
- 80 percent of the cases reviewed in the Covington Region; and
- 75 percent of the cases reviewed in the Shreveport Region.

The State's peer case review process utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: All 30 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 7. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether OCS/DSS had established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 7 was rated as a Strength in 24 (80%) of the 30 applicable cases.
- Item 7 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 6 (20%) of the 30 applicable cases.

Ratings for this item varied across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of St. Tammany cases and 87.5 percent of Desoto/Natchitoches cases, compared to 62 percent of Orleans cases.

The case review found that children in the 30 foster care cases had the following permanency goals:

- 6 children had a goal of adoption.

- 6 children had a goal of reunification.
- 16 children had a goal of long-term foster care or emancipation.
- 2 children had a goal of permanent placement with relatives.

At the time of the onsite review, 23 (77%) of the 30 children in the foster care cases had been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months. Termination of parental rights (TPR) had been sought in 9 of the 23 cases. For the 14 cases for which TPR had not yet been filed, there were reasons for not filing in 13 of the case files. There was only one case file that did not have a reason for not seeking TPR.

Item 7 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child's permanency goal was appropriate and had been established in a timely manner. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The goal is not appropriate given the needs of the child and the circumstances of the case (1 case).
- The goal is appropriate, but there was a delay in establishing the goal (5 cases).

Of the 16 children who had a case goal of long-term foster care/emancipation, 14 were age 13 or older at the time of the onsite CFSR. For all of these cases, reviewers determined that alternative permanency goals had been explored prior to establishing the goal of long-term foster care. However, there were 7 other children in the cases sampled who were age 13 or older who had permanency goals of reunification, permanent placement with relatives, or adoption.

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR reported that concurrent planning has been implemented statewide and has enhanced the timeliness for permanency and for establishing appropriate permanency goals. Stakeholders noted that concurrent planning is required for all foster care cases, and that caseworkers are required to have a permanency plan in place within 30 days. On site reviewers noted that St. Tammany Parish (Covington Region) was the first OCS/DSS office to implement concurrent planning as a pilot in November 1998. Concurrent planning was implemented statewide in March 2001. Although policy has been implemented statewide, reviewers did not note evidence of concurrent planning during the on-site CFSR.

Stakeholders also made the following observations: (1) children's permanency goals are reviewed regularly both by the courts and during OCS/DSS case staffings, (2) concurrent planning is in place in that workers look for alternative permanency homes while working toward reunification, and (3) foster parents are advised of the concurrent plans. Stakeholders expressed the opinion that children's permanency goals usually are appropriate and that reunification is most often the child's first goal. Finally, stakeholders indicated that OCS/DSS adheres to ASFA provisions regarding seeking TPR for those children in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months.

Determination and Discussion: Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 20 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the OCS/DSS had not established an appropriate goal for the child in a timely manner. A key concern pertained to the finding that the goal of reunification often is maintained for a long period of time even when achieving this goal appears unlikely.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the results of the peer case review conducted in SFY 2003 indicate that cases were rated as a Strength for this indicator in:

- 85.6 percent of the cases Statewide;
- 68.8 percent of the Orleans Region case;
- 86.7 percent of the Covington Region cases; and
- 100 percent of the Shreveport Region cases.

The State's peer case review process utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument

Item 8. Reunification, Guardianship, or Permanent Placement With Relatives

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Item 8 was applicable for 8 of the 30 foster care cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine whether OCS/DSS had achieved the goals of reunification or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner or, if the goals had not been achieved, whether OCS/DSS had made, or was in the process of making, diligent efforts to achieve the goals in a timely manner. The results of this assessment were that item 8 was rated as a Strength in all 8 (100%) applicable cases.

Six children had a permanency goal of reunification and two children had a goal of permanent placement with relatives. In six cases, the child's goal was achieved during the period under review (2 permanent placements with relatives and 4 reunifications). In 5 of these cases, the goal was achieved within 12 months of the child's entry into foster care.

Item 8 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child's permanency goal had been achieved in a timely manner (6 cases), or that OCS/DSS was making concerted efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner (2 cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this item were in general agreement that OCS/DSS is effective in reunifying children in a timely manner. They noted that OCS/DSS provides parents with the necessary services and that foster parents work with biological parents to help

them make the changes necessary for reunification to occur. Orleans stakeholders reported that OCS/DSS and local judges work together to achieve reunifications in a timely manner.

Determination and Discussion: Item 8 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although in 100 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that OCS/DSS had made or was making concerted efforts to achieve the permanency goal of reunification or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner, FY 2001 data from the State Data Profile indicate that the percentage of reunifications occurring within 12 months of entry into foster care (65.0%) did not meet the national standard of 76.2 percent or more.

There is some indication that this difference in findings is due to the fact that physical reunification often takes place before “legal” reunification either because caseworkers or agency attorneys do not complete the necessary paperwork for case closure in a timely manner or because the State has maintained custody for a short period of time to ensure provision of post-reunification services. Consequently, the number of reunifications (based on case closure) reported to AFCARS as occurring in a specific time period may be less than the number of actual physical reunifications that occurred during that time period.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the results of State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2003 peer case reviews with respect to this indicator were the following:

- Statewide, 87 percent of cases reviewed were rated as a Strength;
- In the Orleans Region, 100 percent of cases were rated as a Strength;
- In the Covington Region, 83.3 percent of cases were rated as a Strength; and
- In the Shreveport Region, 100 percent of the cases were rated as a Strength.

The State’s peer case review process utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

The Statewide Assessment also indicates that use of guardianship as a permanency goal has not been significant. Statewide aggregate data for the past 3 years shows that 4 children (0.1%) in FFY 1999, 2 children (0.0%) in FFY 2000, and 3 children (0.1%) in FFY 2001 had a permanency goal of guardianship.

Item 9. Adoption

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Six of the 30 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 9. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether diligent efforts had been, or were being, made to achieve a finalized adoption in a timely manner. The results were the following:

- Item 9 was rated as a Strength in 2 (33%) of the 6 applicable cases.
- Item 9 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 4 (67%) of the 6 applicable cases.

There were two cases in which an adoption was finalized during the period under review. In both cases, the child had been in foster care for 4 years before a finalized adoption. For the four remaining cases, only one child was in an adoptive placement at the time of the onsite CFSR.

Item 9 was rated as a strength in one case when reviewers determined that the adoption had been finalized in a timely manner. In the other case, the item was rated as a Strength because reviewers determined that the child was in an adoptive placement and the OCS/DSS was making diligent efforts to finalize the adoption within 24 months.

The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that OCS/DSS had not taken the steps necessary to achieve a finalized adoption in a timely manner. In one case, reviewers determined that the goal of adoption was not appropriate because the child was 17 and was in a stable placement with a relative.

Stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that adoptions occur in a timely manner for young children, but not for older children. Most stakeholders reported that most adoption delays are due to the special needs of children, particularly to behavioral disorders. Stakeholders in Desoto/Natchitoches indicated that TPRs in that locality may not be timely because some judges do not agree with TPR and give parents more time to meet their case plan requirements. Stakeholders identified the following additional barriers to timely adoptions:

- Louisiana has a forced heirship law that requires parents who adopt to divide their estate with all of their children, not just their biological children; and
- The State's adoption subsidy rate is only 80 percent of the Foster Care Board rate, which discourages foster parents from adopting.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the following findings:

- In 67 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that OCS/DSS had not made concerted efforts to achieve a finalized adoption in a timely manner.
- FY 2001 data from the State Data Profile indicate that the State's percentage of finalized adoptions occurring within 24 months of removal from home (11.6%) does not meet the national standard of 32.0 percent or more.

The Statewide Assessment reports the following findings with regard to this item from the peer case reviews conducted in SFY 2003:

- The item was rated as a Strength in 31.0 percent of the cases reviewed Statewide;
- The item was rated as a Strength in none of the cases reviewed in the Orleans Region;
- The item was rated as a Strength in 42.9 percent of cases reviewed in the Covington Region; and
- The item was rated as a Strength in 28.6 percent of the cases reviewed in the Shreveport Region.

The number of cases reviewed was not specified. The State's peer case review process utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Sixteen foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 10. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine if OCS/DSS had made, or was making, diligent efforts to assist children in attaining their goals related to other planned permanent living arrangements. The results were the following:

- Item 10 was rated as a Strength in 11 (69%) of the 16 applicable cases.
- Item 10 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 5 (31%) of the 16 applicable cases.

Item 10 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child was in a planned permanent living arrangement that meets his or her needs (6 cases), or that the child received appropriate services to make the transition from foster care to independent living (5 cases). The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the child was not in a placement with a family who had expressed a commitment to provide long-term care for the child (1 case), or that OCS/DSS had not provided sufficient services to help the child make the transition from foster care to independent living (4 cases).

Most stakeholders commenting on this item reported that there is a wide array of independent living services. However, some stakeholders suggested that there is a need for more transitional living facilities and that the clothing allowance of \$30 per month is not adequate to meet the needs of young people, particularly if they are employed. Stakeholders also noted that lack of transportation

for youth, particularly youth in rural areas, impedes their ability to maintain full-time or part-time employment. State-level stakeholders reported that there are slots dedicated for children emancipating from foster care who need services from the Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities.

In contrast to case review findings, stakeholders expressed the opinion that very few cases are assigned the goal of long-term foster care.

Determination and Discussion: Item 10 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 31 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that OCS/DSS had not made concerted efforts to: (1) ensure that the child was in placement with a family who was committed to long-term care, and/or (2) provide services to help the child transition to independent living.

According to the Statewide Assessment, long-term foster care is used as a permanency plan goal in the State. However, the Statewide Assessment also notes that Statewide aggregate data indicate a decline in the use of this goal from 15.4 percent of children in care in FFY 1999 to 13.7 percent of children in care in FFY 2001.

Permanency Outcome 2

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Desoto/ Natchitoches	Orleans	St. Tammany	Total	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	6	12	9	27	90.0
Partially Achieved:	2	1	0	3	10.0
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	0	0	0	
Not Applicable:	6	9	5		

STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME 2

Louisiana achieved substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 90.0 percent of the cases, which is equal to the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

Performance with respect to achieving Permanency Outcome 2 varied across localities included in the onsite CFSR. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 100 percent of St. Tammany cases and 92 percent of Orleans cases, compared to 75 percent of Desoto/Natchitoches cases.

CFSR case review findings indicate that OCS/DSS makes concerted efforts to: (1) ensure that foster care children are placed in close proximity to their parents and/or communities of origin whenever appropriate; (2) place children in foster care with their siblings whenever appropriate; (3) establish sufficient visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings in foster care; (4) maintain children's connections to extended family, religion, race/ethnic heritage, school, and friends while they are in foster care; (5) seek and evaluation both paternal and maternal relatives as placement resources; and (5) promote the parent-child relationship while children are in foster care.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 2 are presented below.

Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Of the 30 foster care cases, 20 were applicable for an assessment of item 11. Cases determined to be not applicable were those in which (1) TPR had been attained prior to the period under review, (2) contact with parents was not considered to be in the child's best interest, and/or (3) parents were deceased or whereabouts were unknown. In assessing item 11, reviewers were to determine whether the child's most recent foster care setting was in close proximity to the child's parents or close relatives. The results of the assessment were that all applicable cases were rated as a Strength (100%).

Item 11 was rated as a Strength when the child was placed in the same county or community as the family of origin (10 cases), or when reviewers determined that the out-of-county placement was appropriate because it met the child's treatment or placement needs (10 cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this item reported that OCS/DSS makes concerted efforts to place children in their community (Parish) of origin, unless the child has special needs that cannot be met in the community.

Determination and Discussion: Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 100 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that OCS/DSS made diligent efforts to ensure that children were placed in foster care placements that were in close proximity to their family and community of origin, when appropriate.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Louisiana makes every effort to place children entering foster care in the most appropriate and available placement. This includes placing children in close proximity to their homes of origin and/or in the community. The peer case reviews conducted in SFY 2003 rated proximity of foster care placement as a Strength in 91.3 percent of cases Statewide, 83.3 percent of cases in the Orleans Region, 93.3 percent of cases in the Covington Region, and 91.7 percent of cases in the Shreveport region. The State's peer case review process utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

Item 12. Placement with siblings

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Seventeen of the 30 foster care cases involved a child with siblings who were also in foster care. In assessing item 12, reviewers were to determine whether siblings were, or had been, placed together and, if not, whether the separation was necessary to meet the needs (service or safety needs) of one or more of the children. This assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 12 was rated as a Strength in 16 (94%) of the 17 applicable cases.
- Item 12 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 1 (6%) of the 17 applicable cases.

In 8 of the 17 applicable cases, the child was in a placement with at least 1 other sibling, and in 4 of those cases, the child was in a placement with all siblings.

Item 12 was rated as a Strength if the child was in placement with all siblings (4 cases), or if reviewers determined that the separation of siblings was necessary to meet at least one child's safety or treatment needs (11 cases). The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in one case when reviewers determined that OCS/DSS had not made concerted efforts to place siblings together.

Stakeholders commenting on this item reported that siblings are placed together unless separation is necessary to meet the needs of the children.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the finding that in 94 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that OCS/DSS made diligent efforts to place siblings together in foster care whenever possible.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the results of the State's peer case review system conducted in SFY 2003 were that the item was rated as a Strength in 89.8 percent of cases reviewed Statewide, 77.8 percent of Orleans Region cases, 100 percent of Covington Region cases, and 90 percent of Shreveport cases were rated as a Strength. The number of cases was not specified. The State's peer case review process utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 13 was applicable for 24 of the 30 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if TPR had been established prior to the period under review and/or parents were no longer involved in the children's lives. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine (1) whether OCS/DSS had made, or was making, diligent efforts to facilitate visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings in foster care, and (2) whether these visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of children and families. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 13 was rated as a Strength in 21 (87.5%) of the 24 applicable cases.
- Item 13 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 3 (12.5%) of the 24 applicable cases.

Typical visitation between children and their mothers for the 13 cases for which this assessment was applicable was the following:

- Weekly visits – 2 cases.
- Twice a month visits - 4 cases.
- Monthly visits – 4 cases.
- Less than monthly visits - 2 cases.
- No visits – 1 case.

Reviewers determined that OCS/DSS had made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation in one of the three cases in which visits between children and their mothers occurred less frequently than once a month.

Typical visitation between children and their fathers for the seven cases for which this assessment was applicable was the following:

- Weekly visits – 1 case.
- Monthly visits – 3 cases.
- Less than monthly visits – 3 cases.

Reviewers determined that in all three cases in which visits with father occurred less frequently than once a month, OCS/DSS had made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation.

Visitation between siblings was applicable in 13 cases in which siblings were not placed together in foster care. Typical visitation between siblings was the following:

- Weekly visits – 1 case.
- Twice a month visits – 5 cases.

- Monthly visits – 5 cases.
- Less than monthly visits – 2 cases.

Reviewers determined that OCS/DSS had made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation in one of the two cases in which visits with siblings occurred less frequently than once a month.

Item 13 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the frequency of visitation met the needs of children and parents (17 cases), or that, when visitation was less frequent than needed, OCS/DSS made diligent efforts to promote more frequent visitation (4 cases). The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Visitation with mothers was not sufficient to meet the child's needs and OCS/DSS did not promote more frequent visitation (2 cases).
- Visitation with siblings was not sufficient to meet the children's needs and OCS/DSS did not promote more frequent visitation (1 case).

Stakeholders commenting on this item were in agreement that visits between children in foster care and their parents and siblings occur on a regular basis (at least once a month). They noted that foster parents often facilitate visitation, and that transportation and other supports are provided either by foster parents or OCS/DSS caseworkers.

Determination and Discussion: Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 87.5 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that OCS/DSS made concerted efforts to ensure that visitation between parents and children and between siblings in foster care was of sufficient frequency to meet the needs of the child.

In contrast to the onsite CFSR findings, the Statewide Assessment reports that this item was identified as an Area Needing Improvement in the State's peer case reviews conducted in SFY 2003. The peer case review rated this item as a Strength in 45.5 percent of cases in the Orleans Region, 66.7 percent of cases in the Covington Region, 84.6 percent of cases in the Shreveport Region, and 67.2 percent statewide. The State's peer case review system utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

Item 14. Preserving connections

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Item 14 was applicable for assessment in all 30 foster care cases. In assessing item 14, reviewers were to determine whether OCS/DSS had made, or was making, diligent efforts to preserve the child's connections to neighborhood, community, heritage, family, faith, and friends while the child was in foster care. The assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 14 was rated as a Strength in 26 (87%) of the 30 applicable cases.
- Item 14 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 4 (13%) of the 30 applicable cases.

Reviewers indicated that in 26 of the 30 cases, children's primary connections were “significantly” preserved while they were in foster care; in 3 of the 30 cases, children’s primary connections were “partially” preserved; and in 1 case, children’s primary connections were “not at all” preserved.

Item 14 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the OCS/DSS had made concerted efforts to maintain children’s connections to one or more of the following:

- Extended family (21 cases).
- Racial/ethnic heritage (6 cases).
- Religion (7 cases).
- School/friends (9 cases).
- Former foster family (3 cases).

The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- OCS/DSS had not assisted the child in maintaining connections with extended family (3 cases)
- OCS/DSS had not made efforts to help the child maintain connections to his Native American heritage (1 case). In that case, there was no effort explore the mother’s and child’s eligibility to be enrolled as a member of a Native American Tribe not located in Louisiana.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that OCS/DSS caseworkers make diligent efforts to maintain children’s connections, particularly with extended family and schools. However, they reported that sometimes it is problematic to keep the children in their same school district when they are placed in foster care. Stakeholders also noted that OCS/DSS stresses the use of life books and that foster parents maintain the life books and share information with the children about their families of origin.

State-level stakeholders said that there is an OCS/DSS protocol that is to be followed when an investigation is conducted on a child who is identified as Native American. This protocol requires OCS/DSS to notify the Tribe as soon as possible after the OCS/DSS receives a report on a child who has been identified as Native American. Stakeholders reported that in Parishes where Tribes are located, the protocol usually is implemented in a timely manner. However, in areas where Tribes are not located, notification may be happening “long after the fact.” Some stakeholders suggested that training around the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is lacking for OCS/DSS caseworkers across the State.

Determination and Discussion: Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 87 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that OCS/DSS had made diligent efforts to preserve children's connections.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the SFY 2003 peer case reviews rated this item as a Strength in 82.4 percent of the cases reviewed Statewide, 50 percent of the Orleans Region cases, 66.7 percent of the Covington Region cases, and 100 percent of the Shreveport Region cases. The State's peer case review process utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

Item 15. Relative placement

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Twenty-nine of the 30 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 15. One case was not applicable because the child entered foster care from a relative's home in order to receive treatment services and another relative placement would not have been appropriate. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether OCS/DSS had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives (both maternal and paternal relatives) as potential placement resources for children in foster care. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 15 was rated as a Strength in 25 (86%) of the 29 applicable cases.
- Item 15 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 4 (14%) of the 29 applicable cases.

Performance on this indicator varied across the CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of St. Tammany cases and 85 percent of Orleans cases, compared to 75 percent of Desoto/Natchitoches cases.

Item 15 was rated as a Strength when the child's current placement was noted to be with a relative (8 cases), or when reviewers determined that OCS/DSS had made diligent efforts to search for both maternal and paternal relatives when appropriate (17 cases). The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that OCS/DSS: (1) had not made diligent efforts to search for either maternal or paternal relatives (1 case), (2) had sought maternal but not paternal relatives (2 cases), or (3) did not identify and evaluate potential relative resources in a timely manner (1 case).

Stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that both OCS/DSS and the courts make concerted efforts to seek relatives as placement resources and to attempt to find absent fathers. Stakeholders also noted that OCS/DSS can place children with relatives without court intervention, and that, under the Kinship Care program, relatives receive TANF funds to assist them in caring for the children.

Determination and Discussion: Item 15 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 86 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that OCS/DSS had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives as potential placement resources.

According to the Statewide Assessment, 25 percent of OCS/DSS foster care children are placed with relatives. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the State's effort to support relative placement includes the Kinship Care Program, which provides financial support to relatives (using TANF funds) and avoids foster care placements.

The Statewide Assessment reports the following results of the State's peer case review conducted in SFY 2003 with regard to this item. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, relative placement was rated as a Strength in:

- 78.1 percent of cases reviewed Statewide;
- 60 percent of Orleans Region cases;
- 80 percent of Covington Region cases; and
- 93.3 percent of Shreveport Region cases.

The State's peer case review system utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 16 was applicable for 20 of the 30 foster care cases. A case was considered not applicable if (1) parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review and parents were no longer involved with the child, or (2) a relationship with the parents was considered to be not in the child's best interests. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether OCS/DSS had made diligent efforts to support or maintain the bond between children in foster care and their mothers and fathers. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 16 was rated as a Strength in 19 (95%) of the 20 applicable cases.
- Item 16 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 1 (5%) of the 20 applicable cases.

Item 16 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that OCS/DSS had made concerted efforts to promote the relationship between the child and his or her parents. Item 16 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in one case when reviewers determined that visitation between the mother and child was not sufficient to promote bonding and that OCS/DSS had not promoted more frequent visitation.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue noted that there are a number of ways that OCS/DSS supports the relationship of children in foster care with their parents. These included the following: (1) encouraging frequent visitation, (2) having foster parents engage with biological parents and model appropriate parenting, (3) providing recreational activities and family therapy, and (4) encouraging parents to be involved with the children's activities.

Determination and Discussion: Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because reviewers determined that in 95 percent of the applicable cases, OCS/DSS made concerted efforts to support the parent-child relationships of children in foster care.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State's peer case reviews, conducted in SFY 2003, resulted in a rating of Strength for this item in 75.6 percent of the cases reviewed Statewide, 33.3 percent of the Orleans Region cases, 71.4 percent of the Covington Region cases, and 92.3 percent of the Shreveport Region cases. The State's peer case review process utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

III. CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

Well-Being Outcome 1

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Desoto/ Natchitoches	Orleans	St. Tammany	Total	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	11	13	10	34	68.0
Partially Achieved:	3	8	2	13	26.0
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	1	2	3	6.0
Not Applicable:	0	0	0	0	

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 1

Louisiana did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 68.0 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity.

There was some variation across CFSR sites with regard to performance on this outcome. The outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 79 percent of the Desoto/Natchitoches cases and 71 percent of the St. Tammany cases, compared to 59 percent of the Orleans cases.

The CFSR case reviews found that OCS/DSS makes concerted efforts to ensure that caseworkers' contacts with children are of sufficient frequency and quality to meet their needs and ensure their safety and well-being. The case reviews also found, however, that OCS/DSS is not consistent in its efforts to meet the service needs of children and families, involve parents and children in case planning, and ensure sufficient contacts between caseworkers and parents. The lack of consistent effort with regard to these indicators was found more frequently in the in-home services cases reviewed than it was in the foster care cases. For example, the item assessing the frequency and quality of caseworker contact with parents (item 20) was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of the foster care cases compared to only 59 percent of the in-home services cases. In addition, the item assessing OCS/DSS efforts to meet the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents (item 17) was rated as a Strength in 90 percent of the foster care cases compared to only 45 percent of the in-home services cases.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Well-Being Outcome 1 are presented and discussed below.

Item 17. Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 17 was applicable for all 50 cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether OCS/DSS had (1) adequately assessed the needs of children, parents, and foster parents; and (2) provided the services necessary to meet those needs. The results were the following:

- Item 17 was rated as a Strength in 36 (72%) of the 50 applicable cases (27 of the 36 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 17 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 14 (28%) of the 50 applicable cases (3 of the 14 cases were foster care cases).

Ratings for this item differed by “case type” – i.e., foster care cases or in-home services cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 90 percent of foster care cases, compared to 45 percent of in-home services cases. There was less variation in ratings across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 79 percent of both Desoto/Natchitoches and St. Tammany cases, compared to 64 percent of Orleans cases.

Item 17 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the needs of children, parents, and foster parents had been adequately assessed and that identified services were met. The item was rated an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Children's needs were not assessed (5 cases).
- Needed services were not provided to children (7 cases).
- Services were provided but were not appropriate to the child's needs (1 case).
- Parents' needs were not assessed (7 cases – in 5 cases, neither parent's needs were assessed; in 1 case, the mother's needs were assessed but not the father's; and in 1 case, the father's needs were assessed but not the mother's).
- Needed services were not provided to parents (6 cases – in 3 cases services were provided to one parent but not the other).
- Foster parent's needs were not assessed (1 case).
- Needed services were not provided to foster parents (1 case).

Most stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that OCS/DSS is effective in assessing service needs and providing services to children, parents, and foster parents, both initially and on an ongoing basis. A few stakeholders, however, reported that there are delays in accessing some services and that there is a scarcity of substance abuse treatment, mental health, and parenting education services.

Determination and Discussion: Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 28 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that OCS/DSS had not adequately assessed and/or addressed the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents. A key finding was that the needs of children and parents generally are adequately assessed and addressed when children are in foster care, but that OCS/DSS is less consistent in making diligent efforts to assess and provide services to children and families in the in-home services cases.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State's peer case reviews conducted in SFY 2003 resulted in the finding that this item was rated as a Strength in 76.6 percent of the cases reviewed Statewide, 52.2 percent of the Orleans Region cases, 84 percent of the Covington Region cases, and 80 percent of the Shreveport Region cases. The State's peer case review process utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that OCS/DSS has attempted to improve services to children and families through a number of efforts including a focus on substance abuse treatment services and on ensuring access to health services for children living in foster family homes.

Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 18 was applicable for 49 of the 50 cases. One case was not applicable because TPR had been attained prior to the period under review and the child was not old enough to participate and was not in placement with pre-adoptive parents. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether parents (including pre-adoptive parents or permanent caregivers) and children (if age-appropriate) had been involved in the case planning process, and if not, whether their involvement was contrary to the child's best interest. A determination of involvement in case planning required that a parent or child had actively participated in identifying the services and goals included in the case plan. The assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 18 was rated as a Strength in 33 (67%) of the 49 applicable cases (24 of the 33 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 18 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 16 (33%) of the 49 applicable cases (5 of the 16 cases were foster care cases).

Ratings for this item varied by type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 83 percent of foster care cases compared to only 45 percent of in-home services cases. There was minimal variation in ratings across CFSR sites.

Item 18 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that all appropriate parties had actively participated in the case planning process. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Mothers who should have been involved in case planning were not involved (8 [24%] of 34 applicable cases).
- Fathers who should have been involved in case planning were not involved (8 [38%] of 21 applicable cases).
- Children who were old enough to have been involved in case planning were not involved (11 [27%] of 41 applicable cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed differing opinions regarding the involvement of parents and children in the case planning process. Some stakeholders suggested that parents are routinely involved in case planning through their participation in the Family Team Conferences and Administrative Reviews where the case plan is developed and revised. These stakeholders also noted that transportation is provided to parents to attend these conferences and reviews. In contrast, other stakeholders expressed concern that many parents do not seem to be aware of what is in their case plan and that their input is not routinely sought. All stakeholders, however, voiced concern that children are not actively involved in case planning on a routine basis and that the parents are more likely to be involved in case planning than are the children, even if the children are old enough.

Determination and Discussion: Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 33 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that OCS/DSS did not make diligent efforts to involve parents and/or children in the case planning process. A key concern was the lack of involvement of fathers.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State's SFY 2003 peer case reviews rated child and family involvement in case planning as a Strength in 68.9 percent of the cases Statewide, 36.4 percent of the Orleans Region cases, 84 percent of the Covington Region cases, and 87 percent of the Shreveport Region cases. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the peer case review identified a need for improvements in caseworker documentation of parental involvement in case planning and a need for training of caseworkers in involving parents, particularly fathers, in case planning. The State's peer case review process utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

Item 19. Worker visits with child

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: All 50 cases were applicable for an assessment of item 19. In conducting this assessment, reviewers were to determine whether the frequency of visits between caseworkers and children was sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child's safety and well-being, and whether visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment. The results of the assessment were the following:

- Item 19 was rated as a Strength in 43 (86%) of the 50 cases (27 of the 43 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 19 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 7 (14%) of the 50 cases (3 of the 7 cases were foster care cases).

Ratings for this item varied as a function of type of case, with 90 percent of foster care cases rated as a Strength compared to 80 percent of in-home services cases. Ratings for this item exhibited minimal variation across CFSR sites.

Reviewers noted the following with respect to frequency of caseworker contacts with children for the 30 foster care cases:

- In 2 cases, visits typically occurred weekly.
- In 3 cases, visits typically occurred twice a month.
- In 20 cases, visits typically occurred once a month.
- In 5 cases, visits typically occurred less than monthly.

Reviewers noted the following with respect to frequency of caseworker visits for the 20 in-home services cases:

- In 1 case, visits typically occurred twice a month.

- In 14 cases, visits typically occurred monthly.
- In 5 cases, visits typically occurred less than monthly.

In two foster care cases and in two in-home services cases, reviewers determined that the caseworker's contact with the child did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service provision, and goal attainment.

Item 19 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and children were sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child's safety and well-being and promote attainment of case goals. For the most part, this required at least monthly visitation, although in six cases, less than monthly visitation was deemed sufficient because of the circumstances of the case.

This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The frequency of caseworker visits was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child, but when visits occurred, they focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (3 cases).
- The frequency of caseworker visits was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child, and when visits did occur, they did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (4 cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that caseworkers visit children on a routine basis and with sufficient frequency to ensure their safety and well-being. However, stakeholders noted that older foster children with a goal of long-term foster care or emancipation tend to be visited with less frequency than younger children, and that, although this may be in accord with policy, it may not meet the needs of these youth.

Determination and Discussion: Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the finding that in 86 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that caseworker visits with children were of sufficient frequency and/or quality.

According to the Statewide Assessment, peer case reviews conducted in SFY 2003 resulted in this item being rated as a Strength in 86.1 percent of the cases reviewed Statewide, 72.7 percent of the Orleans Region cases, 87.5 percent of the Covington Region cases, and 87.5 percent of the Shreveport Region cases. The State's peer case review process utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that requirements regarding caseworker visits with children depend on various aspects of the case. Children who are 6 years old or younger (in-home cases) are to receive worker visits at least monthly. Children who are 7 years

old or older are visited once every 2 months. The frequency of visitation for all children is Agency custody is at minimum monthly, regardless of their case plan goal.

Item 20. Worker visits with parents

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 20 was applicable for 41 of the 50 cases. Cases were not applicable for assessment if TPR had been attained prior to the period under review and/or the parents were no longer involved with the child. Reviewers were to assess whether the caseworker's face-to-face contact with the children's mothers and fathers was of sufficient frequency and quality to promote attainment of case goals and/or ensure the children's safety and well being. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 20 was rated as a Strength in 33 (80%) of the 41 cases (21 of the 33 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 20 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 8 (20%) of the 41 cases (none of the 8 cases were foster care cases).

Ratings for item 20 differed by type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of foster care cases, compared to 59 percent of in-home services cases. Ratings also differed across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 92 percent of Desoto/Natchitoches cases, compared to 76 percent of Orleans cases and 72 percent of St. Tammany cases.

Typical patterns of caseworker visits with mothers were the following (36 applicable cases):

- Weekly visits – 1 case (which was a foster care case).
- Twice a month visits - 5 cases (3 of which were foster care cases).
- Monthly visits – 19 cases (7 of which were foster care cases).
- Less than monthly visits – 10 cases (4 of which were foster care cases).
- No visits – 1 case (which was a foster care case).

Typical patterns of caseworker visits with fathers were the following (27 applicable cases):

- Monthly visits - 8 cases (5 of which were foster care cases).
- Less than monthly visits – 12 cases (5 of which were foster care cases).
- No visits – 7 cases (2 of which were foster care cases).

Reviewers determined that caseworker contacts with either mothers or fathers did not focus on issues relevant to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment in four of the in-home services cases.

Item 20 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that caseworker visits with parents occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of parents and children, and that visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- Visits were not occurring with sufficient frequency, but when they did occur, they focused on substantive issues pertaining to the case (4 cases).
- Visits were not occurring with sufficient frequency, nor did they focus on substantive issues pertaining to the case such as case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (4 cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that caseworkers visit the parents of foster children monthly and the frequency of visits with parents in in-home services cases ranges from weekly to monthly, depending on the circumstances. These observations were not consistent with case-review findings.

Determination and Discussion: Item 20 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 20 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and/or quality of caseworker visits with parents were not sufficient to monitor the safety and well-being of the child or promote attainment of case goals. However, the lack of sufficient visitation applied only to in-home services cases; 100 percent of foster care cases were rated as a Strength for this item.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the peer case reviews conducted in SFY 2003 resulted in the finding that this item was rated as a Strength in 68.2 percent of the cases reviewed Statewide, 35.7 percent of the Orleans Region cases, 82.6 percent of the Covington Region cases, and 81.8 percent of the Shreveport Region cases. The number and types of cases reviewed were not provided. The State's peer case review process utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that by policy, OCS/DSS caseworkers are required to have face-to-face visits with parents at least twice monthly during the first 3 months of a child's stay in foster care. If reunification is the goal, caseworkers are required to have face-to-face visits at least twice monthly after the initial 90-day period. One visit must be in the parent's home. If the goal is adoption, reunification with the non-custodial parent, or placement in the custody of a relative or non-relative, caseworkers are required to engage in monthly face-to-face visits.

Well-Being Outcome 2

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Desoto/ Natchitoches	Orleans	St. Tammany	Total	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	7	14	11	32	78.0
Partially Achieved:	3	4	0	7	17.1
Not Achieved or Addressed:	1	1	0	2	4.9
Not Applicable:	3	3	3		

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 2

Louisiana did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 78.0 percent of the applicable cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

Ratings for this outcome varied across CFSR sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 100 percent of St. Tammany cases, compared to 74 percent of Orleans cases and 64 percent of Desoto/ Natchitoches cases.

A key CFSR finding was that OCS/DSS is not consistent in meeting children's educational needs.

The findings for the item assessed for Well Being Outcome 2 are presented below.

Item 21. Educational needs of the child

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 21 was applicable for 41 of the 50 cases reviewed. Cases that were not applicable for assessment included those in which the children were not of school age or did not have needs pertaining to education-related issues. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether children's educational needs were appropriately assessed and whether services were provided to meet those needs. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 21 was rated as a Strength in 32 (78%) of the 41 applicable cases (23 of the 32 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 21 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 9 (22%) of the 41 applicable cases (5 of the 9 cases were foster care cases).

Item 21 was rated as a Strength in 82 percent of the foster care cases, compared to 69 percent of the in-home services cases.

Item 21 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that all educational needs were assessed and addressed as appropriate. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that educational needs were not assessed (4 cases) and/or educational services were not provided (8 cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that OCS/DSS is not consistently effective in meeting children's educational needs. They noted that there are problems obtaining services for children with special needs and there tend to be extensive school absences for children with special needs that are not being adequately addressed. Orleans stakeholders noted that the court often must court-order education-related services in order to get educational needs met

Determination and Discussion: Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 22 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that OCS/DSS had not made diligent efforts to meet children's educational needs.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the results of the State's peer case reviews conducted in SFY 2003 were that this item was rated as a Strength in 67.3 percent of the cases Statewide, 37.5 percent of Orleans Region cases, 85.7 percent of Covington Region cases, and 100 percent of Shreveport Region cases. The State's peer case review process utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that OCS/DSS caseworkers are required to work with the child, parents, foster parents, other caregivers, school officials, and regional Department of Education special education coordinators. In addition, copies of the child's most current educational files are to be maintained in the case file and updated as necessary. Finally, administrative reviews of foster care cases include discussions of children's educational status.

Well-Being Outcome 3

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Desoto/ Natchitoches	Orleans	St. Tammany	Total	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	8	15	12	35	72.9
Partially Achieved:	4	4	0	8	16.7
Not Achieved or Addressed:	1	3	1	5	10.4
Not Applicable:	1	0	1		

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 3

Louisiana did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 72.9 percent of the 48 applicable cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity.

Performance on this outcome varied across CFSR sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 92 percent of St. Tammany cases, compared to 68 percent of Orleans cases and 62 percent of Desoto/Natchitoches cases.

A key CFSR finding is that OCS/DSS is consistent with regard to making concerted efforts to meet children's physical health needs, but is less consistent in its efforts to meet children's mental health needs. Key concerns identified pertained to a lack of accessibility of mental health services. Both the case reviews and information from stakeholder interviews indicate that many children in OCS/DSS caseloads have mental health service needs that are not being addressed.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Well-Being Outcome 3 are presented and discussed below.

Item 22. Physical health of the child

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 22 was applicable for 41 of the 50 cases reviewed. Cases that were not applicable were in-home services cases in which physical health concerns were not an issue. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether (1) children's physical health needs had been appropriately assessed, and (2) the services designed to meet those needs had been, or were being, provided. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 22 was rated as a Strength in 39 (95%) of the 41 applicable cases (30 of the 39 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 22 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 2 (5%) of the 41 applicable cases (neither of the 2 cases were foster care cases).

Item 22 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that children's health needs were routinely assessed and services provided as needed. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in one in-home services case when reviewers determined that OCS/DSS did not monitor a child who was taking medication for depression. In the other case, the item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because reviewers determined that the health status of all of the children in the family in an in-home services case had not been appropriately assessed, although there was evidence that an assessment was warranted.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue were in agreement that OCS/DSS is effective in meeting children's physical health needs, including dental and orthodontic services. They noted that OCS/DSS' collaboration with the health agency and various health programs has had positive results for both initial medical assessments and routine check-ups.

Determination and Discussion: Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the finding that in 95 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that OCS/DSS had adequately addressed children's health needs.

These findings are not consistent with information reported in the Statewide Assessment. According to the Statewide Assessment, the findings of the SFY 2003 peer case review were that this item was rated as a Strength in 59.3 of the cases reviewed Statewide, 44.4 percent of Orleans Region cases, 84.2 percent of Covington Region cases; and 64.7 percent of Shreveport Region cases. The State's peer case review process utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that OCS/DSS has worked with KID MED (Louisiana's EPSDT provider) to enhance mental health, dental, and physical screenings and examinations for children served by the OCS/DSS. Foster care children are eligible for

and receive Medicaid services. Required dental services are paid by Medicaid funds. The Statewide Assessment also notes that physical examinations are provided during initial assessment when children enter foster care. Annual dental examinations are provided to foster care children.

Item 23. Mental health of the child

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 23 was applicable for 42 of the 50 cases reviewed. Cases that were not applicable were those in which the child was too young for an assessment of mental health needs, or mental health needs were not an issue in the case. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether (1) mental health needs had been appropriately assessed, and (2) appropriate services to address those needs had been offered or provided. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 23 was rated as a Strength in 31 (74%) of the 42 applicable cases (23 of the 31 cases were foster care cases).
- Item 23 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 11 (26%) of the 42 applicable cases (6 of the 11 cases were foster care cases).

Ratings for this item varied slightly as a function of case type, with the item rated as a Strength in 79 percent of the foster care cases compared to 62 percent of the in-home services cases. Variation across CFSR sites was more extensive. The item was rated as a Strength in 92 percent of St. Tammany cases, compared to 67 percent of Desoto/Natchitoches cases and 65 percent of Orleans cases.

Reviewers determined that children’s mental health needs were “significantly” assessed in 33 cases, “partially” assessed in 6 cases, and “not at all” assessed in 1 case. Reviewers determined that mental health service needs were “significantly met” in 27 cases, “partially met” in 10 cases, and “not at all met” in 2 cases.

Item 23 was rated as a Strength when reviewers noted that children’s mental health needs were “significantly” assessed and mental health service needs were either “significantly” or “partially” met. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- Children with identified mental health service needs did not receive ongoing mental health assessments and/or treatment (4 cases).
- No mental health needs assessment was conducted, although the evidence suggested that an assessment was warranted (1 case).
- Necessary mental health services were not provided (6 cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this item were in general agreement that OCS/DSS is not consistently effective in meeting children’s mental health needs. They identified the following concerns:

- Difficulty accessing services.
- Delays in psychiatric evaluations.
- Poor quality psychiatric evaluations.

State-level stakeholders indicated that OCS/DSS has a contract with the Louisiana State University (Health Science Center) to implement a statewide Clinical Evaluation Program (CEP) that does focus on improved assessments and timeliness of assessments. Stakeholders also described the Jefferson Infant Mental Health Project. This project conducts several hours of comprehensive evaluations focusing on the child and the family. A foster care team works extensively with foster parents to ascertain developmental needs and behavioral issues. Medicaid funds are used for services and evaluations and cases are kept in the project until permanency is achieved.

Determination and Discussion: Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 26 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that OCS/DSS was not effective in addressing the children's mental health needs. The concerns identified pertained primarily to service provision and to ongoing assessments. OCS/DSS was found to be more consistent in meeting the mental health needs of children in the foster care than it was in meeting those needs for children in the in-home services cases.

This determination is consistent with information in the Statewide Assessment. According to the Statewide Assessment the results of the SFY 2003 peer case reviews were that this item was rated as a Strength in 76.9 percent of the cases reviewed Statewide, 66.7 percent of Orleans Region cases, 73.7 percent of Covington Region cases, and 85 percent of Shreveport Region cases. The State's peer case review process utilizes a modified version of the CFSR case review instrument.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that OCS/DSS is engaged with ChildNet (coordination with Department of Education [Division of Special Populations] and Department of Health and Hospitals [Medicaid Service Maximization]) to use EPSDT services and to access inpatient psychiatric hospital beds for children with severe impairments or special educational and mental health needs.

SECTION 2: SYSTEMIC FACTORS

IV. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3X	4

Louisiana achieved substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. Information pertaining to the item addressed for this factor is provided below.

Item 24. State is operating a Statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding months, has been) in foster care.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 24 was rated as a Strength because the CFSR determined that the State is operating a Statewide information system that readily identifies the status, demographic characteristics, location, and placement goals for children in foster care.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Louisiana's primary automated data system is the Tracking Information and Payment System (TIPS). TIPS provides audit trails for OCS clients and meets Federal and State requirements for identifying the status, demographic characteristics, location, placement goals, legal status, investigations, and services delivered for children in foster care. TIPS includes the Central Registry (mandated by State law) and the Louisiana Adoption Resource Exchange (LARE). Client investigative data are available, but are limited to valid findings only. Data on programs, services, and placements from 1983 to the present are available. TIPS data are used for program planning and policy decision-making.

The Statewide Assessment notes that TIPS produces over 600 reports and has the capacity to deliver on-demand reports (e.g., supervisory reports, financial reports, client outcomes and aggregate data reports, and program reports) to State, regional and Parish

offices. TIPS also has a “tickler” feature for services and case review requirements, including permanency hearings, and is linked with other State social services and health agencies to facilitate interagency client searches and service coordination.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that an external automated data system operated by the Office of Youth Development (OYD), Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, also is a major tool in the State’s information system. OYD uses the Juvenile Information Records Management System (JIRMS) to track juvenile justice clients’ identification, status, demographic characteristics, location, placement goals, legal status, and services. JIRMS generates monthly reports relating to caseload, administrative reviews, permanency planning hearings, and title IV-E eligibility for juvenile justice clients.

Stakeholders commenting on the Statewide information systems during the onsite CFSR reported that TIPS and JIRMS can track the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals of children in foster care. Stakeholders expressed the opinion that information in TIPS usually is entered in a timely manner and is accurate. Stakeholders noted that there are “checks and balances” in the system designed to promote accuracy. For example, a supervisor must sign off on the information before data entry occurs. However, some stakeholders expressed concern about the accuracy of information regarding case events, specifically purchase of services information, and information pertaining to judicial activities and medical services. Stakeholders reported that training is provided on TIPS to all relevant staff, although some staff continue to perceive the system as not being “user friendly.”

Stakeholders identified the following as important features of TIPS:

- A “tickler” feature that is essential to effective case management.
- The ability to generate numerous reports, which are useful to field workers and managers.
- The provision of access to other State OCS/DSS data systems, such as child support, prison, TANF, and Medicaid, thus enabling workers to compile background information on families (e.g., locating absent parents, service provision).

A key problem identified by stakeholders was that TIPS and JIRMS do not interface.

V. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3X	4

The State of Louisiana is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. The findings pertaining to the items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 25. Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s) that includes the required provisions.

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Item 25 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because the CFSR findings indicate that written case plans for children are not developed jointly with children's parents on a consistent basis.

According to the Statewide Assessment, written case plans are required by Louisiana law. Although Federal and State law require that the child welfare agency develops case plans within 60 days after a child enters State custody or placement in a non-secure program, OCS/DSS and OYD policy have established a 30-day requirement for the development of case plans. Case plans are finalized at the Family Team Conference and subsequent case plans are completed every 6 months. The case plan includes an assessment of the family's strengths and needs, reasons for care, barriers preventing return to the family, and specific child needs. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, Louisiana's quality assurance system concluded that 97 percent of foster care cases have a case plan within 60-days. Eighty-six percent have case plans within 30 days.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that parents are engaged in case planning through the Family Team Conference and that various supports are provided to enable their participation, including transportation and interpreter services. The Statewide Assessment reports that approximately 62 percent of parents have attended the FTC over the past four years. The State also has implemented two projects to enhance parental involvement in case planning—the Family Group Decision Making pilot in the Baton Rouge Region and a Mediation pilot (developed by the Court Improvement Program) in the Orleans and Jefferson Regions.

Stakeholders commenting on case plans and the case planning process during the onsite CFSR were in general agreement that children have case plans, that they are developed in a timely manner (usually within 30 days), and that they are reviewed and reassessed on an ongoing basis. Most stakeholders reported that parents are actively involved in the case planning process and that OCS/DSS engages in the following practices to promote parent involvement: (1) engaging non-custodial parents and offering an opportunity for input and services, (2) visiting the home within 2 and 5 days of case opening or entry into care (respectively), (3) using mediation sessions to address issues, (4) using family team conferencing for in-home cases as well as foster care cases (St. Tammany only), and (5) actively

discussing parental involvement in case planning during court hearings (as required by the Louisiana Children's Code). However, several stakeholders indicated that parents are not sufficiently engaged in case planning. They reported that some case plans are pre-developed without parental input or that parents only learn of the case plan at the Family Team Conference. Stakeholders noted that as part of the usual procedure, there are checklists that are provided to parents at the case planning meetings that list problem areas. Stakeholders reported that sometimes parents are given the opportunity to check the problems that they believe are applicable in their situation, and sometimes the caseworker fills out the checklist and then asks the parents to provide input.

The CFSR case reviews found that OCS/DSS is not consistent in its efforts to involve parents in the case planning process. A particular concern was identified with regard to the lack of involvement of fathers who were available to participate and whose involvement was not considered to be contrary to the child's best interest. In the case reviews, 38 percent of the fathers who should have been involved in case planning were not involved, compared to 24 percent of the mothers.

Item 26. Provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 26 was rated as a Strength because CFSR findings indicate that Louisiana provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child no less frequently than once every 6 months.

According to the Statewide Assessment, administrative case reviews are conducted every 6 months for every child in foster care. Louisiana uses the Family Team Conference to conduct the 6-month administrative hearings. Caseworkers are notified of cases due for this required administrative review through TIPS. OCS/DSS assigns a staff member from the quality assurance unit to serve as the administrative reviewer. Case review outcomes are tracked and monitored through the QA systems. The courts also conduct review hearings every 6 months. The State's use of automated data systems, partnerships with the Office of Youth Development (OYD), and the court improvement program are contributing factors in the State's maintaining its case review system.

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR were in general agreement that both the administrative and court 6-month case reviews are taking place in a timely manner. However, some stakeholders expressed concern that court reviews for adoption cases may be delayed because of a lack of cross-regional coordination. Also, Desoto/Natchitoches stakeholders reported that the quality of court reviews may be negatively impacted by having cases heard by a different judge at each review because of judicial rotations.

Item 27. Provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 27 was rated as a Strength because the CFSR determined that Louisiana provides a process that ensures that each foster child under the State's placement and care responsibility has a permanency hearing no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Louisiana courts with juvenile jurisdiction are required to conduct permanency hearings not more than 12 months after the child's removal from his or her home. Subsequent permanency hearings are held by the courts at least once every 12 months or earlier until the child has a permanent placement.

The Statewide Assessment notes that in 2002, the Louisiana Supreme Court issued a set of orders for child welfare cases. This included mandatory ASFA training for judges and a requirement that courts must report continuances to the Supreme Court and prepare compliance reports on cases that exceed allowable timeframes. The Statewide Assessment reports that an audit of child welfare cases in 18 independent court districts was conducted by the State in 2001 and that findings from this audit were the following: (1) 93 percent of cases have an initial permanency hearing within 12 months, (2) 94 percent of subsequent permanency hearings are also held within 12 months, and (3) permanency hearings continuances occurred in only 1 percent of the cases reviewed.

Stakeholders interviewed regarding this issue during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that 12 month-permanency hearings are held in a timely manner, and often are scheduled earlier. Stakeholders identified the following agency- and court-related practices as contributing to timely and productive hearings:

- Having a person who serves as a liaison between the OCS/DSS and court,
- Using court staff to search for absent parents, and
- Adopting the benchbook developed by the Court Improvement Program to guide the hearing.

State- and local-level stakeholders expressed the opinion that the number of continuances has reduced dramatically. St. Tammany stakeholders reported that continuances in that site have been reduced from 10 percent to 4-5 percent and they attributed this reduction to the requirement that all continuances have to be reported to the Louisiana Supreme Court for review.

Item 28. Provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 28 was rated as a Strength because CFSR findings indicate that Louisiana provides a process for TPR proceedings that is ASFA-compliant.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Louisiana Children’s Code provides the statutory basis to pursue termination of parental rights (TPR) for children who have been in out-of-home care for 15 of the most recent 22 months from the time of adjudication. Parents are informed at the Family Team Conferences that Federal law mandates termination of parental rights when a child has been in foster care for 17 months or 15 months from the date of disposition. The courts reinforce this message during the adjudicatory process.

The Statewide Assessment notes that Louisiana filed 176 TPR petitions in 2001 and 272 TPR petitions in 2002 and that participants in focus groups convened for the Statewide Assessment expressed the opinion that the State files TPRs in a timely manner. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the courts are making “exception findings” when appropriate, although the frequency and nature of the exceptions to TPR are not tracked in any State system.

Information provided in the Statewide Assessment indicates that when delays occur in the TPR process, they usually are due to the court denying the petition because there are not sufficient services for the parents or because the State was unable to establish that OCS/DSS provided reasonable services or made “reasonable efforts” to bring about reunification. Postponed adjudication hearings also create delays in the TPR process.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR were in general agreement that procedures are in place for terminating parental rights in accordance with ASFA timeframes. Stakeholders noted that OCS/DSS and the courts make concerted efforts to ensure that TPR petitions are filed in a timely manner. Stakeholders also reported that exceptions to TPR are used and documented appropriately. This is consistent with case review findings. Stakeholders suggested that exceptions are used most often in cases involving older teens who do not wish to be adopted or cases involving parents who are making substantial progress with the case plan. Stakeholders noted that a key barrier to attaining TPR in a timely manner is the delay in the adjudication phase.

Item 29. Provides a process for foster parents, preadoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 29 is rated as a Strength because the CFSR determined that Louisiana has a process for foster parents, preadoptive parents, and relative caregivers of foster care children to be notified of, and to have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Louisiana law and policy require caseworkers to notify caretakers by mail of their right to attend each hearing and their right to be heard during all administrative hearings and court proceedings. The Statewide Assessment also notes that caseworkers frequently inform caretakers about the Family Team Conferences (FTC) and court hearings during in-person and telephone contacts. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the courts are required to provide notice to parents and caretakers of court hearings, and OCS/DSS is required to provide notice to foster parents, preadoptive parents, and relative caregivers.

Information in the Statewide Assessment indicates that the Quality Assurance Review System tracks foster parents' and other caretakers' attendance at the Family Team Conferences. If a caretaker fails to attend the hearing, the caseworker must report to the court his/her efforts to notify the caregiver. To support caretakers' participation in the review process, DCS/OCS has developed two publications—one for foster parents and one for relative caretakers—that identifies the caretakers' roles and responsibilities in case planning and court hearing activities. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, 74 percent of caregivers and foster parents Statewide have attended Family Treatment Conferences (the dates of data collection were not provided in the Statewide Assessment).

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR were in general agreement that foster parents, preadoptive parents, and relative caregivers are routinely notified of administrative reviews and court hearings. However, Desoto/Natchitoches stakeholders reported that foster parents are not routinely notified of court hearings in the Desoto Parish.

Stakeholders also expressed the opinion that while foster parents usually attend administrative reviews and court hearings, the opportunity to be heard in the court hearing varies depending on the judge. Some judges permit foster parents to testify in the courtroom or in the judge's chambers, but many judges do not ask foster parents to provide input during the hearings. A few stakeholders suggested that some foster parents do not want to speak in the courtroom because they feel uncomfortable in that setting, they lack training in how to participate appropriately, and/or they are reluctant to anger or upset parents with whom they will have to have contact with after the hearing.

VI. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3	4 X

Louisiana is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Quality Assurance System. The findings for each of the indicators assessed for this item are presented below.

Item 30. The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 30 is rated as a Strength because the CFSR findings indicate that Louisiana has developed and implemented standards to ensure that foster children are provided quality services that protect the children's safety and health.

According to the Statewide Assessment, minimum standards for foster care are contained in licensing regulations maintained by the Bureau of Licensing, an entity within DSS. The Bureau licenses public and private child-placing agencies. Adherence to standards and OCS/DSS compliance with State and Federal law are determined through licensing reviews, administrative and quality assurance reviews, peer case reviews, and residential provider and foster care reviews. The Statewide Assessment reports that annual re-certification of foster/adoptive parents is another approach instituted by the State to protect children's safety and health and ensure compliance with standards. State-level and regional-level consumer committees and continuous quality improvement committees are used to gain feedback for developing OCS/DSS corrective actions.

The Statewide Assessment also indicates that OYD imposes standards of care for its contract providers and monitors them on a semi-annual basis. OYD also monitors provision of services. It is accredited by the American Correctional Association.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR indicated that the State's policy, standards, and practices are effective and ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services. They noted that the quality assurance system monitors standards of care. State- and local-level stakeholders indicated that involvement in the Council of Accreditation process has augmented foster care standards statewide, noting that the State and six regions have received accreditation, and the remaining four regions are awaiting notice of their status.

Item 31. The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 31 is rated as a Strength because the CFSR determined that OCS/DSS is operating a multi-faceted quality assurance system that (1) is in place in all OCS/DSS Regions where the services included in the State's Consolidated CFSP are provided, (2) evaluates the quality of services, (3) identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, (4) provides relevant reports, and (5) evaluates program improvement measures implemented.

Stakeholders indicated that there is a very strong collaboration between OCS/DSS and Louisiana State University (LSU) in terms of quality assurance issues. LSU has been asked to study four important issues: (1) criminal justice referrals; (2) maltreatment in foster care; (3) timeliness to adoption; and (4) child fatalities. The expectation is that by the end of CY2003, LSU will have data to start the analyses phase. LSU is also involved with a six-year follow up study with the assessment piece on the Infant Attachment Program with the Jefferson Parish Mental Health Project. A branch of the LSU Social Work School conducts an extensive survey process that gathers information for OCS/DSS from diverse populations. LSU has a contract to evaluate the SAFE Project. A LSU professor has completed an analysis of other States' program improvement plans.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Louisiana has integrated quality assurance (QA) into all facets of the OCS/DSS through the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) system. This consists of formalized quality assurance measures for child protection investigation, family services cases, foster care and adoption services, as well as contract monitoring, consumer surveys, program audits, financial audits, and conflict mediation of public complaints. QA reviewers examine all foster care cases during the initial administrative review and examine a sample of cases for the second administrative review. In addition, a random sample of cases is

reviewed by the QA team each month and supervisors are informed regarding the findings. District Managers review open Family Services cases every 6 months and supervisors review cases monthly and provide feedback directly to caseworkers.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, there is a Continuous Quality Improvement team at the State office level and within each region. CQI teams include youth and families served, OCS/DSS staff, members of advisory boards, and consumer advocates. Teams review findings from peer case reviews, customer satisfaction surveys, etc. Consumer committees and CQI committees at the State level provide feedback about OCS/DSS responsiveness to the community and the quality of the service array. Surveys are conducted on an ongoing basis to evaluate OCS/DSS performance. The CQI process responds to issues raised from 11 different areas or subcommittees and develops corrective action strategies.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that a peer case review system was established to respond to the accreditation requirements of the Council on Accreditation and to the Federal child and family services review. The Statewide Assessment notes that reports from the peer case reviews are useful tools for linking services to local, regional, and statewide improvement initiatives. In addition, reports from the Quality Assurance Tracking System and TIPS are used as tools to monitor and improve service delivery.

Most stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that OCS/DSS has an identifiable QA system that is implemented Statewide, that evaluates the quality of services and outcomes for children and families, and that addresses child protection investigations, family services, administrative reviews, and foster care cases. State-level stakeholders suggested that the State's involvement in the Council on Accreditation (COA) process has contributed to the development of many of the QA procedures and that the QA process has resulted in positive changes in policy and practice, such as greater individualization of service plans and increased focus on safety and health assessments. Stakeholders noted that the CQI and Peer Case review processes have led to regional corrective action plans for the OCS/DSS and have enhanced individual professional development.

VII. TRAINING

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3	4 X

Louisiana achieved substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training. The findings pertaining to the items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 32. The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 32 is rated as a Strength because Louisiana is operating a staff development and training program that supports the State's Consolidated CFSP goals and objectives, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Louisiana provides comprehensive, competency-based training and professional development for its OCS/DSS staff. Louisiana law R.S. 46:285 mandates that newly hired and promoted caseworkers and supervisors receive a minimum of 32 hours of instruction before case assignment or transfer to new duties. Juvenile justice staff in OYD receive 40 hours of orientation prior to job assignment. The Statewide Assessment also reports that the Louisiana Department of Civil Service has established Statewide mandatory training for supervisors.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, the Competency-Based and Performance-Directed Curriculum categorizes training and professional development into basic, intermediate, and advanced levels. The basic curriculum includes an introduction to child protective services, staff safety, casework process, physical indicators of child maltreatment, and program-specific sessions. New worker training includes workbook-based lessons, supervisory conferences, and observing/shadowing experienced workers. Supervisors are trained in methods to integrate classroom curriculum with on-the-job training and conferences. The curriculum for supervisory training includes four areas of certification, which lead to eligibility for Certified Public Manager status.

The Statewide Assessment reports that OCS/DSS contracts with seven universities to provide stipends to undergraduates who complete child welfare/social work coursework and who accept employment with the OCS/DSS upon graduation.

State- and local-level stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR were in general agreement that the State provides competency-based training to new workers and training for supervisors, as required by Louisiana law. Stakeholders also indicated that training is effective and prepares new workers to do their jobs. Stakeholders in Orleans and Desoto/Natchitoches said that new workers shadow more experienced workers before they assume a caseload. However, stakeholders in St. Tammany indicated that new

workers often assume their full caseload immediately after training, because the caseload demands do not allow for time for new workers to shadow more experienced workers. Most stakeholders expressed positive views of the training but suggested that workers need time to shadow or team with experienced staff before assuming case assignments. Stakeholders reported that there are no barriers to receiving initial training, noting that the OCS/DSS pre-pays hotel bills and provides a travel advance so that new workers can attend training.

Item 33. The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 33 is rated as a Strength because the CFSR determined that OCS/DSS mandates ongoing training for staff and provides ongoing training opportunities for staff that are designed to enhance the skills and knowledge necessary to ensure continuous improvement in workers' capacity to address the needs of children and families.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Louisiana requires 32 hours of ongoing training annually during the second and third years of employment. Twenty hours of ongoing training are required annually following the third year of employment. Juvenile justice staff in OYD receive a minimum of 40 hours of annual training. The Statewide Assessment notes that in 2002, OCS/DSS staff completed 63,240 hours of training, with more than 1,000 staff completing 20 or more hours. The Statewide Assessment also notes that OCS/DSS provides stipends for staff to pursue Masters of Social Work (MSW) degrees on a full-time basis and a tuition reimbursement program for staff to pursue MSW degrees on a part-time basis.

Information in the Statewide Assessment indicates that Continuous Quality Improvement teams and Peer Case Reviews are used to assess ongoing training needs. One of the recent training needs identified by the OCS/DSS pertains to training on involving parents – especially fathers – in the case planning process.

Most stakeholders commenting on ongoing staff training during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that OCS/DSS provides adequate ongoing training for workers and supervisors. Stakeholders noted that each region has a training budget and a flexible training plan to ensure that new and experienced workers are able to meet their annual training requirements. They also noted that OCS/DSS provides supports to facilitate ongoing training and skill development, such as granting 8 hours of educational leave per week, providing tuition reimbursement, and developing annual training plans. A few stakeholders said that there are multiple opportunities for cross training with other State offices, law enforcement, and the courts. St. Tammany stakeholders reported that

there is a cross-training for court staff, law enforcement, Court Appointed Child Advocates, and OCS/DSS staff called “Together We Can.”

Item 34. The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 34 is rated as a Strength because Louisiana provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving title IV-E foster care or adoption assistance that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Louisiana provides formalized instruction for foster and adoptive parents on a Statewide basis using the Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting – Group Preparation and Selection (MAPPS-GPS) curriculum. Foster/adoptive parents are required to complete 30 hours of initial training prior to certification and kin caregivers must complete 12 hours of initial training. Both foster parents and relative caregivers must receive 15 hours of in-service training each year. Staff members in child residential care facilities receive 24 hours of orientation within 1 week of their employment. Staff in child-placing programs receive an orientation and must participate in at least 32 hours of training within the first 6 months of employment.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, training for foster parents incorporates multiple modalities and the subject matter is flexible. Training needs are assessed through on-going technical assistance, quality assurance, and critical incident reporting. The Statewide Assessment indicates that the Louisiana State Foster and Adoptive Parent Association takes an active role in planning and presenting foster parent training. Regionally-developed training opportunities also are offered in adjacent regions to maximize and leverage resources and professional expertise. The Statewide Assessment reports that in 2002, 3,625 foster parents participated in training.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR reported that the State is effective in providing pre-service and in-service training to foster parents and relative caregivers. Local-level stakeholders reported that all foster parents receive 30 hours of training prior to certification. However, stakeholders in St. Tammany expressed concern that relative caregivers are not trained before receiving provisional licenses, and that they receive only 12 hours of initial training.

Stakeholders indicated that training is “available, encouraged, and effective.” They said that MAPP-GPS training is held at least quarterly, sessions are held in the day and evening, and training can be accessed over the Internet. In addition, stakeholders noted that OCS/DSS provides day care and transportation services to caregivers so that they can attend ongoing training.

VIII. SERVICE ARRAY

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3 X	4

Louisiana achieved substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array. The findings for the items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 35. The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.

☒ X Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 35 is rated as a Strength because CFSR findings indicate that Louisiana has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, OCS/DSS provides a wide array of services in all 10 regions that builds upon extensive collaborative relationships with public and private providers. These services include family-based in-home services, homemaker services, referrals to treatment resources, independent living services, and preventive services for at-risk populations. Family preservation and support services are provided Statewide through the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that Louisiana is currently seeking national accreditation for its Family Services Program through the Council on Accreditation. Post-adoptive services and subsidies are provided to eligible families after finalization and until the child's 18th birthday.

Stakeholders commenting on the issue of service array during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that multiple services are available to meet a range of needs. Stakeholders noted that many services are offered within Parishes, such as in-home services for families, medical services for foster children, and independent living services and the Young Adult Program for older adolescents.

Item 36. The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP.

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Item 36 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because CFSR findings indicate that all services are not accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the Louisiana Consolidated CFSP.

According to the Statewide Assessment, in most regions of the State, key services are located in metropolitan areas and not in rural areas. Consequently, lack of transportation is a consistent barrier to accessing services. Other barriers to accessing appropriate services noted in the Statewide Assessment were waiting lists and, in some areas, providers that have limited evening hours. The Statewide Assessment also reports that adequate mental health and substance abuse services are not available in all Parishes.

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR were in general agreement that services are not accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions of the State. Stakeholders voiced concern that rural areas and Parishes with high poverty rates are underserved, and lack psychiatric and mental health services. In addition, in some areas, services are available but access is difficult because of long waiting lists and lack of transportation.

Stakeholders identified accessibility concerns regarding the following services in some rural and urban settings:

- Mental health evaluations and services for children (particularly child psychiatrists, as noted by Orleans stakeholders).
- Inpatient substance abuse treatment and services for adults, youth, and families (parents with children).
- Transition services for older youth who are aging out of the system and who are not receiving Independent Living services.

- Family preservation services that serve families over a longer period of time rather than just at the time of crisis (stakeholders noted that at present there are only 237 family preservation “slots” Statewide).
- Transportation to access services.
- Doctors and dentists who will accept Medicaid.
- Community-based group care.
- Groups for male sex offenders.
- Groups for domestic violence perpetrators.
- Recreational services for families and youth (additional funding).

Item 37. The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the OCS/DSS.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 37 is rated as a Strength because CFSR findings indicate that the services provided by OCS/DSS can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families.

According to the Statewide Assessment, OCS/DSS caseworkers and other relevant staff work directly with foster children, their parents, and/or families and the foster parents on an individual basis and in mandated family team conferences to prepare client-specific child and family services plans. OYD contracts with OCS/DSS to provide foster care services for title IV-E juvenile justice clients and the terms of the contract require that youth have individualized plans. The Statewide Assessment also reports that additional services are obtained as needed to meet specific needs and that the Interagency Service Coordination Team is responsible for providing wraparound services for children with severe behavioral problems.

The majority of stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that OCS/DSS makes concerted efforts to individualize services to meet the unique needs of children and families. State- and local-level stakeholders noted that contracted and purchased services are designed to be flexible and that OCS/DSS makes changes in the service array as the population of children in foster care changes. Stakeholders also reported that OCS/DSS has access to flexible funding sources for individualized services (e.g., using Reunification Assistance Funds to pay for rent, utilities, clothing, food, and housing repairs). Stakeholders also said that wraparound services are available through the Interagency Service Coordination Team, which has benefited children with special needs. Finally, several stakeholders reported that the CQI process has promoted an individualization of case plans, which results in individualization of services. In fact, as part of the CQI process, if a case plan is perceived as a “cookie-cutter” plan, it will

be flagged for review and revision. A few stakeholders, however, voiced concern that services are not always sufficiently individualized for families and that greater flexibility is needed.

IX. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3X	4

Louisiana is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. Information pertaining to the items assessed for this systemic factor is presented below.

Item 38. In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 38 is rated as a Strength because CFSR findings indicate that OCS/DSS engages in ongoing consultation with Tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child and family-serving agencies, and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the Consolidated CFSP.

According to the Statewide Assessment, OCS/DSS engages multiple partners in planning and implementing the CFSP. Some of the on-going partners with which OCS/DSS/OCS consults include: Interagency Service Coordination Committee, Louisiana Mental Health Planning Council, Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals/Office of Citizens with Developmental Disabilities, Community and Family Support System Task Force, Governor's Office of Indian Affairs, Louisiana Children's Cabinet, Court Improvement Program, Louisiana Adoption Advisory Board, and Louisiana Foster and Adoptive Parent Association Board. There are four federally recognized Tribes in Louisiana. In addition, based on the 2000 Census, American Indians account for 0.6 percent of Louisiana's population.

The Statewide Assessment reports that stakeholders have decision-making roles on OCS/DSS CQI committees and subcommittees. Louisiana conducts a multi-disciplinary conference each year and this has proven to be an effective medium for exchanging ideas among stakeholders. The State also conducts ten focus groups with its diverse group of stakeholders on an annual basis, and maintains on-going contact with them via committees, surveys, etc.

Most stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that OCS/DSS engages in ongoing consultation with community partners and incorporates their concerns in developing the goals and objectives of the Child and Family Services Plan. Stakeholders noted that there are multiple mechanisms at the State and local level to facilitate ongoing consultation, such as standing committees, monthly meetings, annual surveys, and participation in the COA process. State-level stakeholders noted that the “Community and Stakeholder Committee” is a valuable resource and indicated that the Tribes will be serving on this committee.

Item 39. The OCS/DSS develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP.

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Item 39 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because the CFSR findings indicate that Louisiana does not make diligent efforts to ensure that federally recognized Tribes participate fully in the annual reporting of progress and services process and does not share final Annual Progress and Services Reports with those Tribes.

According to the Statewide Assessment, OCS/DSS engages multiple external partners in evaluating each Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR). State and community partners also recommended changes to the report.

Several external stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR indicated that OCS/DSS involves them in the development of the annual progress report. However, stakeholders reported that the Tribes usually are not significantly involved in the process of preparing these reports, and are not given the annual report for their review and comment.

Item 40. The State’s services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 40 is rated as a Strength because the CFSR found that Louisiana Consolidated CFSP services are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Louisiana Children’s Cabinet has statutory responsibility for coordinating children’s policy across five State departments: Social Services, Health and Hospitals, Education, Labor, and Public Safety and Corrections. The State also has created several initiatives that support coordination of child welfare services across multiple entities. Examples include:

- Children’s Justice Act grants
- Louisiana ChildNet
- Interagency Service Coordination Committee

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that services are well-coordinated between OCS/DSS and State agencies that serve the same populations. State-level stakeholders cited examples of successful efforts among agencies to maximize their limited resources (e.g., an interagency collaboration using TANF funding for a residential treatment for women with dependent children, a multi-OCS/DSS collaboration to improve day care services for children in foster care). In general, stakeholders characterized OCS/DSS as a leader and willing partner in collaborations at the State and local level, proactively tapping various community resources and networks to provide training and integrate services.

However, stakeholders identified the following barriers to coordination and collaboration: (1) limitations prescribed by specific funding streams, (2) lack of communication between some agencies, (3) ambiguity about roles and responsibilities among agencies, and (4) a need for more interagency training to facilitate service coordination.

X. FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3	4 X

Louisiana achieved substantial conformity with the systemic factor pertaining to Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. The findings for each of the items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 41. The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions which are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 41 is rated as a Strength because the CFSR found that Louisiana has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions that are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.

According to the Statewide Assessment, licenses are issued by the DSS Bureau of Licensing (DSS/BL) to each OCS/DSS region, residential treatment care providers, and private child placing agencies. The Statewide Assessment reports that DSS/BL licensing standards are comprehensive and have been in effect since July 1989. The standards for family foster homes address recruitment, home studies, certification, qualifications and responsibilities of foster parents, placement agreements, child services, complaint and grievance procedures, and environmental, health, and safety concerns. Licensing standards are subject to enhancement through OCS policy. A committee meets every four years to review the standards and recommend changes. Annual recertification of foster homes is required. The Statewide Assessment notes that although recertification of foster homes has not been timely in the past, it is now being done on a timely basis.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR affirmed that standards are in place for foster and adoptive homes and that all foster and adoptive homes meet licensing and policy standards. Stakeholders expressed the opinion that certifications and annual recertifications occur in a timely manner.

Item 42. The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 42 is rated as a Strength because the CFSR determined that the standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.

According to the Statewide Assessment, procedures for certification are standardized throughout Louisiana. Foster and adoptive families, private child placing agencies, and residential treatment providers must meet the licensing standards set by OCS/DSS. Relative caregivers meet the same requirements as foster parents.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue for the onsite CFSR indicated that the standards are applied equally to licensed foster families and relative homes. Stakeholders noted that waivers can be requested, typically for non-safety-related issues. They reported that waivers usually are granted to kinship homes, although some non-relative homes also are granted waivers. Stakeholders reported that exceptions to the standards concern space requirements or the number of children in the home and are requested to accommodate kinship placements and sibling groups. They noted that all waiver requests must go through the DSS/Bureau of Licensing.

Item 43. The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 43 is rated as a Strength because the CFSR findings indicate that Louisiana complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements for children.

According to the Statewide Assessment, criminal background checks are required for foster and adoptive parents in Louisiana. Procedures for certification and recertification are standardized statewide. The Statewide Assessment reports that foster and adoptive parents are subject to both a Louisiana State Police and FBI criminal records background check prior to certification. OCS/DSS requires FBI clearance for prospective families that are recruited by private agencies.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, there have been delays in certifying foster and adoptive homes due to the volume of requests submitted to the Louisiana State Police. The State recently purchased a computerized fingerprinting system for each OCS/DSS region so that staff can process the applicant and receive a response within 24-48 hours. Also, the State recently passed legislation what will enable private providers to access the State Police rather than going through OCS/DSS.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR were in general agreement that criminal background checks and child abuse/neglect checks are conducted for all adults over the age of 18 in licensed foster homes and for relative caregivers. While acknowledging that the process is thorough, stakeholders reported that there have been delays of more than one month in obtaining FBI fingerprinting reports and background clearances by the State Police. However, stakeholders indicated that this situation is improving.

Item 44. The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 44 is rated as a Strength because the CFSR determined that Louisiana has in place an identifiable process for assuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed. The pool of foster/adoptive homes (57.4% African American and 42.6% Caucasian) matches the racial composition of children in foster care (58.5% African American and 39.3% Caucasian).

According to the Statewide Assessment, regional and State-level recruitment and retention plans are established on an annual basis. These plans include a needs assessment that targets recruitment of foster and adoptive parents to meet the characteristics of children in the region. Within each region, Home Development unit staff also contract with foster and adoptive parents to assist in recruitment activities.

The Statewide Assessment reports that fifty-seven percent of the foster parents and children are African American and 43 percent of foster parents and children are Caucasian. Foster and adoptive parents participating in focus groups convened for the Statewide Assessment reported that the racial and cultural makeup of the foster parent population matches that of the foster child population and that efforts to target recruitment to the appropriate families are successful.

Stakeholders commenting on the issue of recruitment during the onsite CFSR indicated that the OCS/DSS is successful in recruiting foster homes that reflect the ethnic diversity of the foster care population. They noted that regional recruitment efforts are based on local demographics. State and local-level stakeholders reported that each region has an annual recruitment plan that includes multiple venues (e.g., media campaigns, church meetings, community outreach, and word-of-mouth). Although OCS/DSS conducts targeted recruitment, stakeholders in Orleans Parish indicated a need for more focused recruitment activities for Vietnamese and African-American foster homes.

Item 45. The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 45 is rated as a Strength because the CFSR found that Louisiana has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children. During the period October 1999 to September 30, 2001, 178 interstate adoptions were realized.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Louisiana has been effective in recruiting foster and adoptive homes across jurisdictions. It is the preference of OCS/DSS to place children in close proximity to their original community before seeking placements in adjoining Parishes or other regions. However, the State also recruits adoptive or permanent homes statewide and nationwide to meet special placement needs. Regular adoption exchange meetings are held in various parts of Louisiana to share information among OCS/DSS staff and to present both children and potential adoptive parents for matching. The Statewide Assessment notes that these meetings have been beneficial in finding in-State resources. In the past four years, 215 children were placed using internet photo-listings and placements were made in 9 or more different States each year. In 2002, the State also led the nation in the number of placements made using AdoptUSKids.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue noted that OCS/DSS is very successful in achieving cross-jurisdictional placements and makes effective use of multiple resources. Stakeholders said that although OCS/DSS has a strong inclination to keep children within Parishes, the OCS/DSS also uses interstate compacts, the Internet, private agencies, and adoption exchanges to secure suitable placements for children within the State and across State lines.